

CONGRESS IN OFFICE

BY

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FOREWORD

*In his book entitled "Congress in Office", the author Mr. Venguswamy has approached the subject, not with the bias of the professional politician, but with the detachment of the student of politics. He does not deal with the various measures of reform carried out by individual Congress ministries, but attempts a constitutional survey of Congress governments which have been functioning in eight out of the eleven provinces of India.

The book begins with a survey of the circumstances which led to the suspension of civil disobedience, and the adoption of the parliamentary programme by the Congress. The author has tried to show that many, if not all, of the charges levelled against the Congress governments by the so-called minorities are unfounded. He has also furnished an answer to those who say that Coalition Cabinets alone will solve all our present difficulties. His estimate is expressed in apt language when he says that "the Cabinets as a whole represent a high level of efficiency and earnestness, and that they reflect the stainless patriotism, spirit of service and the revolutionary urge of an awakened nation."

The achievements of the Congress governments, especially in the major fields of prohibition, tenancy and industrial legislation, and educational reform are given sufficient prominence. On the subject of law and order the author says : "The Britisher who once thought that Congress regime would usher in anarchy has now begun

to feel that law and order can be maintained without prejudice to nationalism. If there is repression, it is only the repression of lawlessness, of liberty degenerating into licence. The Congress has shown that Indians can govern themselves and this is no mean achievement."

"Congress and Communalism", and "Reaction on non-Congress Provinces" are chapters which are controversial. The author's opinion is that where the Congress does not govern, Congress ideology governs. He concludes the book with a survey of the events which led to the present political crisis, and of the part which the Congress plays in the evolution of a free and united India.

It is not for me to anticipate public judgment on the book, but I feel that if some differ from him in his views, many others will be found to agree with him. He brings to bear on his task enthusiasm which is evident both in his matter and manner—in his arrangement of the subject and in his style. I trust that the book will be widely read by all those who have interest in the political destiny of our country.

Bombay, 26-2-1940.

BHULABHAI DESAI.

INTRODUCTION

Was it a nine days' wonder, the acceptance of office by the Congress, or was it an event of some importance in the history of India's political evolution? The Congress ministries came and went, but did they leave anything behind them? Are we richer or poorer to-day than we were for this brief spell of national government in the major portion of the country?

I have tried to answer these questions, not as a member of the Congress, but as a student of public affairs who has faith in nationalism. India of the year 1940 is not the same as India of the year 1936. She has won the admiration of the world, vindicated her honour and self-respect, and depends no more on England for the world's recognition. The Congress has given her a status among the nations of the world which she never had during the last two hundred years. An organisation which accomplished this in two short years must be something more than a mere political party. There has been a revolution, silent, bloodless and dignified, and if to-day India is a nation, it is the Congress which made it one.

The Muslim League grumbles, and perhaps with reason too, but not of the kind adduced in the Pirpur Report. It stood apart when the army marched on, but wanted to share the glory when the glory came. The Congress would not allow it. Then followed the astounding discovery that India is not fit for democracy, and that she is a medley of nations. When someone finds fault with

INTRODUCTION

his neighbours for what he is and for what he is not, there is something wrong with him. The old story of the fox without the grapes, in a new light,—that is all.

When I completed writing the book, Congress was in office. No one expected it would go out of office so soon and its splendid work of national regeneration would be interrupted. The war came, ordinances made their appearance and Congress went back into the wilderness. Who knows it will not come into its own before long? Even if it does not, its splendid achievements in the constitutional field will always be remembered. I have tried to record these achievements, but how far I have succeeded in my mission it is for the readers to judge.

The Congress should not long remain in the wilderness. The British Government ought to have known by this time that the only political organisation which has a dynamic programme of action is the Indian National Congress. Others may talk, and talk with a certain gusto too, but they are incapable of action. If India is not to be involved in an internal upheaval, the Congress must be allowed to return to office. The Congress represents the nation because it embodies in itself all the aspirations of the nation. Those who belittle the Congress, if they are Indians, belittle themselves; and if they are foreigners, deceive themselves. It will be, in days to come, the proud privilege of every Indian to sing with the poet :

“ Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
To be young was very heaven.”

Bombay,
4-3-1940,

THE AUTHOR.

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I am glad to acknowledge my indebtedness to all those who have in some form or other helped me in bringing out the book in time. My special thanks, anyhow, are due to Mr. Mangesh Narayan Kulkarni, the Proprietor of the Karnatak Printing Press, but for whose generous sympathy and help, I would not have succeeded in my mission so well as I have done now. The workers who showed a personal interest in my book have laid me under deep obligation to them. If the book is a success, it will in no small measure be due to them.

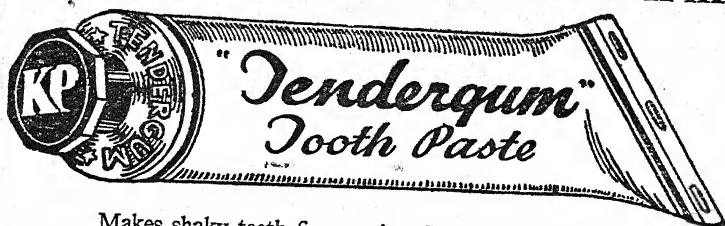
Interest of the kind which Srijut Bulabhai Desai showed in me and in my work is not to be thanked for in formal words. I alone know, the extent of my obligation to him.

4th March, 1940.

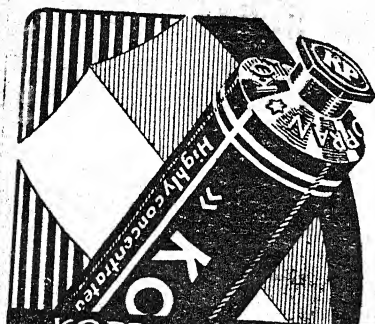
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EVERY POLICYHOLDER A SHAREHOLDER

I

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

There is a halo of romance about the Indian National Congress. From the smallest beginnings, fighting against odds at every stage of its career, it grew up into an organisation representing all the aspirations of renascent India. The enemies of the Congress once believed that it had only masses of people behind it but no good heads. They never realised that the masses approved the Congress and what it stood for because they found brilliant heads in it. For twenty years the Congress did nothing but bring together, organise, and inspire the people with the love of liberty. Many suffered much ; many others even suffered martyrdom. Every new obstacle only helped to make it more compact and invincible than before. The essential purity, and sincerity of purpose underlying the great national movement helped it to brave the storm

unflinchingly. The fight was long and arduous but it led the nation nearer and nearer the destined goal.

Like non-co-operation and civil disobedience, acceptance of office by the Congress was but an incident in the course of its natural evolution. The ideal remains the same ; only the method of approaching the ideal is altered to suit the varying requirements of the times. Non-co-operation and civil disobedience did not produce spectacular results but they produced results of an enduring kind. But for them, the Congress would not have won the position which it occupies in the country to-day. The sacrifice and sufferings of thousands for a noble cause made the nation athinking and inspired it with the same zeal as animated the soldiers themselves. A wave of enthusiasm swept the country and even the most ardent advocates of the safety-first policy could not but acknowledge the sincerity and devotion of the loyal disciples of Mahatma Gandhi. Even if they stood aloof, they ceased to laugh and scoff. The masses realised, though only faintly, that the Congress alone was their friend and benefactor and gradually lent it their support. In 1934 circumstances compelled the Congress to adopt a new programme. The nation fully endorsed it

then. In 1937 with the support of the nation the Congress carried out that programme to its natural and logical conclusion. In eight provinces out of eleven the reins of administration fell into the hands of Congressmen. The law-breakers of yesterday became the lawmakers of to-day. The fairy tale came true.

Perhaps in the recent history of the Congress or of the nation there has not been a more memorable day than the 18th of October 1934. It marked the turning point in the history of the national movement, the end of one long chapter of struggle and suffering and the beginning of a new era of constructive efforts and tangible achievements. The trend of affairs in the country, and the spirit of the times called for a revision of the national programme. Every institution, be it political or social, if it is to function effectively, must have the capacity to adapt itself to the vicissitudes of time. That the Congress possessed this capacity and readiness in a remarkable degree had been proved more than once in the course of its eventful career. The objective before the Congress had always been the attainment of political freedom for the country, but it was never slow or reluctant to adapt its means to the requirements of the occasion. Civil disobedience as a means

to win freedom had its time but it could no longer justify itself under the altered conditions of the year 1934. The movement had proved more than anything else the strength as well as the weakness of the nation and hence under the changed circumstances it would have been a sheer waste of human effort to give it a fresh lease of life. The Congress realising this decided to suspend civil disobedience and introduce parliamentary programme in its stead. The famous decision was taken on October 18, 1934, a date which will serve as a landmark to the future historian of renaissance India.

The suspension of civil disobedience, at the time when it was decided upon was not acclaimed by one section of Congressmen. To them civil disobedience was the only sovereign remedy for all national ills ; to them it was a kind of Zandu's Chyavanprash. Then as now, there were in the ranks of the Congress fanatic visionaries who refused to face facts. Even Mahatmaji, the discoverer of civil disobedience invoked its help only rarely and his few experiments with it convinced him of the country's unpreparedness to wield it successfully. Civil disobedience to be successful requires a high degree of moral development and soul force ; it requires on the part of those who

wish to wield it a certain willingness to court suffering for its own sake. It is true, there were men imbued with the spirit of martyrdom in the Congress ranks but their number was infinitely small. The rank and file of the army had begun to feel aweary of the protracted fight. The ordinary satyagrahi who fought along with the leaders began to wonder why all his suffering and sacrifice resulted in no visible, tangible, good. His idealism was imperfect ; he was not in love with martyrdom. Disappointment stared him in the face and the rigour of oppression that swept the country convinced him that victory was still far away. This disappointment would have gradually led the way to demoralisation had not the watchful leaders discovered the internal danger in time and determined to avert it before the movement suffered a complete set back. The only way in which this could be done was by calling off the movement and by inaugurating a programme which would inspire hope in the worn out soldiers. The decision of the High Command, though it rendered a few visionaries sullen and discontented was welcomed with joy and relief by the nation.

There were yet other factors which influenced the Congress decision to suspend civil disobe-

dience. The isolation of the masses from all kinds of national activities was recognised for the first time as an obstacle in the way of the country's political emancipation. The small band of Socialists under the leadership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru drew the attention of the Congress to the necessity of evolving a new programme which would enable the millions in the rural areas to understand the Congress ideals and actively participate in the national struggle. Civil disobedience and its technique were too profound for the masses to comprehend. Soul-stirring political slogans like Swaraj and independence of the townsmen had no significance for them and left them unmoved. Even intelligent folk in the villages wondered at the folly of Congressmen in trying to pull down a government which was for them invincible. Some of them even went to the extent of attributing every kind of personal and national misfortune to the vagaries of the Congress. The only way to educate them and win them over to the national cause was to appeal to them in a manner and in a language which they could readily understand. Economic regeneration, the Socialists pointed out, was not in any way less important than political independence and suggested that any programme the Congress

might pursue should have this as one of its main items. This growing emphasis on a parallel economic programme naturally necessitated a change of front.

* There was yet a third reason for the Congress striking a new path. One of the factors which retarded the freedom-movement was the unholy alliance of reactionaries and vested interests with the government in power. They had a hand in framing and passing many, if not all, of those repressive measures which almost strangled the country. They got into the legislatures and either inspired or supported every measure of the government. The Congress realised for the first time that it was extremely unwise to stand aloof and allow these men to heap insult upon insult on the country. The line had to be drawn somewhere and at some time. The only effective method of getting rid of them was by Congress itself capturing the legislatures. From within the councils and the Assembly, it could restrain if not effectively prevent the government from intensifying its policy of repression. It could also show the world the real intentions of the government which was never weary of harping on constitutionalism and co-operation. Years ago, the Swarajya Party had done it and there was no rea-

son why it should not be done again. The Congress contained the best brains in the country which for want of opportunities pined away in the uncongenial atmosphere created by civil disobedience. Lastly, the proposal to evolve a new constitution for India with autonomy for the provinces and federation at the centre had actually begun to take shape. Though the Congress resented the imposition of this constitution on the country, it fully realised that the British government would have its own way. The new constitution would be thrust upon India with the support of those political parties whose only creed was co-operation with the government at any cost and at all times. Here was a new danger threatening and it had to be faced boldly. Under the circumstances, it was felt that a fresh lease of life to civil disobedience would be suicidal. The times called for new tactics and the Congress did not wish to be caught napping. For more reasons than one, civil disobedience had been found wanting and it had to be displaced by a dynamic programme of action and not negation. The fight for freedom had to be pursued in the manner of the opponents of the Congress and parliamentary programme alone promised to meet the requirements of the situation. The Congress, true to its

traditions, determined to brave the lion in its own den after driving away the foxes.

The nation whole-heartedly endorsed the Congress decision. Shortly after the inauguration of the parliamentary programme, the Central Assembly elections were announced by the government. The Congress set up candidates of its own and fought the elections vigorously. The results were revealing. They proved many things. They proved that the country fully identified itself with the ideals and aspirations of the Congress ; that the Congress was the only political organisation in the country whose programme was acceptable to the people. Those parties and individuals who till now professed to represent the country were utterly routed. Many of them were sadly disillusioned to find that they had been representing none but their own sweet selves. The Congress triumphed against heavy odds. Its triumph meant the purification of the political atmosphere, though only partially. In the Assembly at Delhi, the Congress Party began to inflict defeat after defeat on the Government. Such another team as was returned in the elections of the year 1935 had never ranged itself as the Opposition in the Assembly. Bulabhai Desai, Satiamurthy, Saxena, Pandit Pant, Dr. Rajan,

Sri Krishna Sinha and many others equally brilliant and capable were the representatives the people returned to the Assembly. To-day, we know that the Congress is the only real opposition in the Central legislature and that its achievements there have considerably enhanced its reputation in the country.

An year went over and in 1935 the India Act emerged out of Parliament. Even the Knights of the Round Table felt gloomy and disappointed but there was nothing which they could do now. Gradually, their usual mood of optimism asserted itself and they once again began to expatiate on the philosophy of co-operation. The Congress from the very outset was determined to wreck the Act but how to wreck it was the problem which it had to solve now. If it stood aloof, reactionaries and 'yes-men' would get into the legislatures and put the clock back by years. Its success in the previous elections and the achievements of its members in the Assembly suggested that it should capture the provincial legislatures and wreck the constitution from within. Having adopted the parliamentary programme, it had to be pushed through to its natural conclusion. Accordingly, the Congress election campaign was inaugurated. What tremendous stir it created, what enthusiasm

it roused in the people, and what hopes it kindled in them cannot be adequately described. We had had innumerable elections but they caused but a ripple here and a ripple there. This Congress campaign penetrated the remotest villages and carried to the suffering millions the message of hope and succour. The Congress President's whirlwind campaign is unforgettable. In the course of a few months, a revolution had come over men's views and ideals. Poor men with begging bowls opposed Rajas and zemindars. Congressmen with no other assets than their jail experience fought against veteran dy-archic ministers and their powerful followers. At last came the day of judgment. The masses justified the confidence the Congress had placed in them ; they nobly responded to the Congress appeal. One election campaign taught them what one century of benevolent government could not teach. They developed an un-erring political instinct and cast their votes in the yellow box. The Congress came out flushing with a victory quite unheard of in the annals of electioneering history anywhere and at any time. In six out of the eleven provinces, that is, in all provinces where the canker of communalism had not eaten up the vitals of healthy public and political life, the Congress

triumphed. Even in the remaining five provinces it was large enough to be the strongest single party in the legislature. Minorities like the depressed classes, and Indian Christians rallied round the Congress. The provincial elections were indéed an eye-opener to the British government. There was jubilation everywhere and there were not persons wanting who believed that the sacrifices and sufferings of thousands spread over well nigh twenty years had borne fruit, had ushered in Swaraj.

II

ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

The Congress fought the elections with the sole object of combating the Constitution Act, or to be exact, to wreck it. Acceptance of office was not a question on which the voters had expressed any opinion and consequently, the results of the elections were no guide to determine policy on this behalf. While one section of the Congress expressed itself in favour of wrecking the Act from within, the other suggested that wrecking from outside alone would be in keeping with the Congress principle of non-co-operation. The Socialists including the Congress President were definitely opposed to the policy of wrecking from within as it implied acceptance of office and a departure from the avowed principles of the Congress. Anyhow, the matter was left to lie over till the completion of the elections.

When the results revealed the triumph of the Congress in the majority of the provinces, the

pro-office party became more vocal and justifiably too than before. It said that here was an opportunity for the Congress to wield power to implement its programme ; that if the opportunity was allowed to slip away, the Congress would be untrue to the electorate which reposed so much confidence in it. The members of this party argued that the splendid chance of proving to the Britisher that the Congress would not shrink back from responsibility and that it could wield the machinery of administration to greater advantage than its predecessors should not be missed on mere technical grounds. The other party, namely, the Congress Socialists, had equally sound arguments in support of its position. It held that office was the bait which the Britishers had thrown in their way to seduce them from their destined goal ; that office acceptance would lead to indolence and lethargy and would ultimately mean the lowering of the Congress ideal. Was this to be the outcome of the terrible sacrifices they had endured for so many years ? Acceptance of office was a sort of compromise and co-operation with the very government they wanted to displace and consequently, it could not be reconciled with their declared objective of wrecking the constitution. They feared assumption of office would in-

evitably lead to corruption, for Congressmen though better than others were not yet angels. The controversy raged wild, the pro-office party reminding those on the other side that the long-sought-for opportunity to serve the country, to relieve the sufferings of the peasants, and of the working class people, to undo the evil effects of years of repression, to give a fillip to the national movement should not be thrown away lightly when at last it came to them. They pleaded that wrecking should not be interpreted literally, that it was at best only a figure of speech. The constitution could be wrecked, its hollowness could be proclaimed to the world even by working it, by going ahead with their revolutionary programme and by bringing themselves into conflict with the special and reserved powers of the governors. If the governors refrained from exercising their powers of interference and left them free to carry out their policy, they would indeed win the substance of their demand. Then they would be able to enhance the prestige of the Congress and add to its strength. When the Congress grew in strength, and made its influence felt among the masses, the British authority would automatically weaken. The fear that office would corrupt them, would make them forget their duties and ideals

was unfounded, for, they were a disciplined body which knew how to resist the temptations of power. Mere opposition in the legislature was a barren policy which would lead them nowhere. New environments required new adaptations. The Socialists never fully appreciated these arguments, for they really feared that office would demoralise the Congress and give a set back to the freedom movement. Like the mediæval saints, they believed not in overcoming temptation, but in running away from it.

At last the time came for taking a decision on this momentous question. The All-India Congress Committee met and the question was discussed in it with great warmth. The all-pervading personality of Gandhiji had not a little to do with the final shaping of opinion in the Committee. Orthodox Congressmen, who were in Mahatmaji's confidence and who had rarely spoken on the subject before, now lent their support to the pro-office party. The result of the deliberations was that the pro-office party won by a good majority. But the Socialists too had their share of triumph in what apparently seemed to be an adverse verdict to them. The Committee's resolution on the subject betrayed an anxiety to placate the Socialists ; it was in essence a compromise

resolution. It "authorised the leaders of parties to accept office, if they were satisfied that the Governor would not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of ministers in regard to constitutional activities." The Congress decided in favour of acceptance of office ; the Socialists made it conditional.

Provincial autonomy was inaugurated on April 1, 1937, but Congressmen could not immediately shoulder responsibility. They could accept office only after getting the formal assurance from the Governors as stipulated in the All-India Congress Committee's resolution. The Governors on their part were not competent enough to give any assurance of the kind demanded. They could not say that they would not use the powers which the Act intended they should use. They were in a difficult situation. The King's government had to be carried on. They anxiously looked about to see whether they could influence any one to form a ministry. Fortunately for them, there were many as anxious as they themselves were to see that the King's government went on uninterrupted. They were prepared to fall in at the slightest hint. The hint was reluctantly given and a blooming team in every province where Congressmen stood aloof shouldered the onerous

responsibility of governing the country on the King's behalf. Nothing exasperated the country so much as this action of persons who formed what came to be known as "interim" ministries. When the majority party refused to undertake the responsibility, the Governors ought to have shouldered it themselves. That would have been dignified, but they did not perhaps wish to place themselves in an embarrassing situation. There was also no necessity for them to go so far when there were persons eager and willing to incur the odium on their behalf. The interim ministries did the greatest disservice to the country. They had no sanction for their conduct except the one of self aggrandisement. They appropriated what legitimately did not belong to them. They stepped in where others refused to tread. Their position was awkward in the extreme. How could they pretend to carry on the King's government, when that government could be carried on only by the elected representatives of the people through the legislature? Had they shouldered the responsibility for the King's government after the Governors had declared a break down of the constitution, their position would not have been so anomalous. As it was, they gave provincial autonomy a bad start; they marred an otherwise auspicious

beginning. The legislatures slept and democracy waited at the door.

The situation was ugly indeed. The interim ministries could govern on the King's behalf only for six months. There would then be a breakdown of the constitution. Another election would follow and the Congress would register a more brilliant victory than before. Things would thus move in a vicious circle and provincial autonomy would stand self-condemned, unless the British government arrived at an agreement with the Congress. The Secretary of State for India, the Viceroy and the Governors held hurried mutual consultations. In the meanwhile, the Congress reiterated its demand, and went on educating the masses on the deadlock. The British government could not give any written assurance, for that would be going against the provisions of the Constitution Act ; but without giving some kind of assurance the machinery of provincial autonomy could not be set in motion fully. How to meet the Congress demand without violating the provisions of the Act was the problem which confronted the Viceroy and the Secretary of State. Gandhiji, the spokesman of the Congress appreciated the difficulties of the government and made them understand that the Congress would be

satisfied with a genuine, informal assurance of non-interference in the constitutional activities of the ministries. The British government were anxious to end the deadlock. They had the responsibility to show that provincial autonomy was not a mere mockery of the real thing. Prestige gave way to good sense and the Viceroy and the Secretary of State came out with their announcements. These announcements were not assurances at all but they paved the way for mutual understanding. The Working Committee met, considered the announcements and embodied its views on them in the following resolution : " The A. I. C. C. at its meeting held in Delhi, on March 18, 1937 passed a resolution affirming the basic Congress policy in regard to the new constitution and laying down the programme of Congress work outside and inside the legislatures. Leaders of parties were asked to accept office if they were satisfied and could state publicly that the governor would not use his special powers of interference or set aside the advice of ministers in regard to constitutional activities. The declarations made by the Viceroy and Lord Zetland were not satisfactory. The doctrine of partnership propounded in their declarations is unacceptable to the Congress. The Committee feels, however,

that the situation created as a result of the circumstances and events that have since occurred warrants the belief that it will not be easy for the Governors to use their special powers." With this resolution the Congress decided to shoulder responsibility.

The Working Committee's resolution does not convince. It sounds hollow. No wonder, it provoked retort from quite unexpected quarters. Mr. Yunus, the interim Minister of Bihar, in the course of his reply to an address presented to him by the Muslims of the city of Calcutta dwelt on the constitutional impasse and the part played by the Congress in it. These were his words : " It is interesting to watch the method adopted by the Congress in deciding to accept office. First, the Congress demanded a written assurance, then a verbal assurance, to the satisfaction of the ministers, then a gentleman's assurance. Then all assurances were dropped and a new formula was created, viz. that in case of difference between the ministers and the Governors, the Governors should dismiss the ministers and then it was suggested that the Governors should call upon the ministers to resign. When His Excellency the Viceroy and the Governors of the different provinces explained the position that it was impossible

to give any of the assurances the Congress decided to accept office in the following terms : "Your replies have always been unsatisfactory. However we accept office."

Few will say that Mr. Yunus was guilty of exaggeration. Three months' bargaining did not produce any tangible gain. A Madras Congressman speaking at a conference over which the Premier presided made this honest confession : "You are all aware of the circumstances under which the Congress has assumed office in six big provinces. It is idle to say that the government gave the Congress the assurance demanded of them but it must be admitted that they got the substance of it and gained much by the demand. The Working Committee authorised acceptance of office greatly influenced by the opinion of the public who were strongly in favour of such a step". To gain the substance of the demand, the Congress should not have wasted three precious months. The ministers could have raised the question of assurance when they actually felt the Governor's encroachment on their rights. The public would certainly have stood by them then also. The remedy being always in their own hands, they ought not to have waited for assurances which never came. The expression "how-

ever " in the Committee's resolution is extremely intriguing. It betrayed an anxiety to make the best of a bad bargain, to justify what was evidently unjustifiable. The Working Committee could have been plainer and bolder in the language of its resolution on a subject which meant so much to the country. This indeed was a poor method of saving one's face ; but let us leave it at that and seek justification in the fact that the end has more than justified the means.

III

THE CONGRESS CABINETS

"Good government is not an acceptable substitute for self government and the only form of self government worthy of the name is government through ministers responsible to an elected legislature."

—Sel. Com. Report on Ind. Const. Reforms.

The Congress decision to accept office was conveyed to the British government, though the language in which it was done was not *particularly gracious* according to Lord Zetland. In those provinces where Congressmen commanded a majority in the legislature, their leaders were invited by the Governors to form their cabinets. The leaders in their turn responded to this invitation.

This cabinet business was new in India and new also to the Congress leaders. Naturally, therefore, the leaders were anxious to see that they did

not take a false step which would undermine the reputation of the great organisation which they represented. Though we had examples of "cabinets" for about seventeen years, they were not such as the Congress could safely copy. Here, the leader of the Congress party was neither a Raja nor a zemindar representing any special interest, but a simple representative of the common people. He had no vested interests to safeguard, no narrow political faction to cajole, no necessity to distribute offices to keep his party safe from disintegration. In the choice of his colleagues, considerations of self could not in the least influence him. His sole consideration was that the cabinet he formed should be such as would be able to carry out the policy and programme of the Congress. The success or failure of the ministry depended on its personnel. Neither personal leanings nor communal considerations could be the guiding factor in the choice of the members of his cabinet. Only men with a record of service and sacrifice, men who identified themselves fully with the ideals of the Congress, men who would willingly and cheerfully succumb to the discipline of the party could be chosen for the arduous task of running the administration. Ministership was no longer to be an

end in itself ; it was to be but a means to an end. The Congress Minister should look upon his office not as a source of wealth and power, but as an opportunity for service and sacrifice. There was the view that Congressmen invariably possessed no ability to handle practical and constructive problems, that they were mere visionaries with a peculiar genius to pull down and not to build. This view had to be refuted and the contrary had to be proved. The critics of the Congress eagerly watched the completion of the cabinets to pronounce their judgments upon them. In the choice of the personnel, as well as in the principles governing that choice, the Congress had to satisfy an exacting world. Here was yet another opportunity for the Congress to show that it contained not merely masses of men but also brilliant heads. As in everything else, its achievements in cabinet making had to be sound, thorough and just.

The leaders, anyhow, went about their work in a congenial atmosphere. In the choice of colleagues, they had to consult none but their own reason and conscience. The party could not dictate ; if consulted, it could offer suggestions. The very perfection of the party organisation and the strictness of the discipline enforced in it made it

possible for the leaders to command the never-failing support and confidence of their followers. Congress, it is true, has made the party machine too dominating and it may appear to the casual observer that there is a tendency to regiment and discipline the individual members till they merge their individuality in the party ; but this emphasis on discipline is inevitable at the present moment when the Congress is shouldering a heavy responsibility. Another peculiar advantage of the leader's position is that he does not depend entirely on his party's support for what he does. There is an organisation above which exercises a definite control not only over the leader of the party, but also over every member of it. The views and decisions of this body are binding on all Congressmen as it is the final authority on all matters relating to Congress programme and Congress discipline. The leader of the party who forms the cabinet, if he wins the approval of this body wins automatically the approval of his party too ; for the party cannot at any time question or challenge the decision of this central caucus. In short, the leader of the party has perfect latitude to choose such men as his colleagues as are in his opinion capable of shouldering the responsibility of administration with him. Neither

the party nor sections of it can force particular candidates on him. The party exists not to restrain the freedom of action of the leader, but to register its approval of his action. This relegation of the party to the background cannot be reconciled with democracy but Congress is now new to this democratic experiment and experience alone will suggest how best the requisite changes can be effected within the Congress constitution.

This complete immunity from party pressure helped the leaders to form cabinets which are not "compromise" cabinets. They say that even in advanced countries every ministry is to some extent a compromise. The reason for this is not far to seek. Compromise is invariably the outcome of imperfect party organisation and loose party discipline. A party may be numerically strong but it may be weak in organisation. The so-called leader of such a party may in reality be only a figure head. There are other minor leaders within the party commanding the confidence of certain small sections whose allegiance to the leader at the top is nominal and remote. It is possible to have within the party itself men who hold divergent views on even fundamental issues. These men while they subscribe to the broad principles and programme of the party reserve to

themselves the right to cling to their own views on particular issues. The leader of such a party has indeed a difficult task to perform when he goes about forming a ministry. If he is to maintain his leadership, and keep the party in power, he has to mollify the minor leaders within the party, for it is only through them that he can keep the party strong and compact. Disgruntled party leaders are always a menace to the leader at the top. The only way in which he can mollify them is by absorbing them into the ministry. The Congress leaders had none of these difficulties to overcome for none of them existed in their party. If anything exercised a control over their otherwise unfettered discretion, it was their earnest desire to make the cabinets as strong and efficient as possible.

When at last the leaders announced the personnel of their cabinets, there was universal approval. The best available men, whose devotion to the country and to the party was unquestioned and unquestionable, and who satisfied the various interests in the country were there. The size of the cabinets was determined in each case by the programme of legislation in view, by the size and resources of the province, and also by the demands of efficiency in administration. While

Orissa has only three ministers, Madras has ten. The members of the various cabinets are invariably persons who represent important geographical units within the province. Personal ability, skill as an administrator, and also capacity to hold one's own against the opposition in the legislature—these essential qualifications were never lost sight of in determining the candidates for ministerial office. Even the worst critics of the Congress, even those who accused the Congress as a Hindu organisation, could not raise their voice against the personnel of the cabinets or against the principles which governed the choice of the personnel. Though posters were displayed in Madras warning the people against 'brahmin raj' by a section of the defunct Justice Party, the Party organ was magnanimous enough to acknowledge the essential fairness of the choice of ministers. But what it gave with one hand it took away with the other. "The even balancing of brahmin and non-brahmin elements" was, according to this Journal, a triumph for the Justice Party. Unfortunately, this dying champion of the dead Justice Party did not realise that the elections to the Central Assembly and to the provincial legislatures had shown that there were hundred times as many non-brahmins in the Congress as

there were in the non-brahmin Justice Party itself. It was the swan song of a journal which for about two decades fought valiantly for justice as it understood it to be and ultimately died broken-hearted, unwept and unhonoured. In the midst of the universal approbation that met the announcement of the Congress cabinets, voices like that of the Justice were either not heard at all or ignored.

Here and there, one heard in the early days of the ministries that minorities were not properly represented in some of them. It is worthwhile to consider whether this complaint has any significance or foundation. Is it necessary that a ministry should be representative of all minority communities? Any one other than a rank communalist can find that in all Congress cabinets reasonable representation is given to minority communities. This is in keeping with the Congress principle of equal opportunities for all. The Congress has repeatedly declared that it would always safeguard and promote the interests of all those communities which require protection and encouragement but this does not mean that the leader who forms the cabinet is bound to give a seat in it to representatives of every minority community. In the formation of the cabinet, the

leader of the party is the sole judge and he has and ought to have unfettered discretion in the selection of his colleagues. While Congress forms the ministry, it is only members of the Congress who can find a place in it. Again, the person returned on the Congress ticket must be qualified in other ways too to discharge his duties as minister. Even if there are qualified candidates capable of being appointed ministers, it must be realised that the cabinet is no place for communal representation. Lastly, even if a minority community is not represented in the cabinet, there is no reasonable ground for fear for that community. The principle which governs election to the legislature has no application to cabinet formation. A cabinet is not intended to satisfy the office-craving of individuals ; its function is not to satisfy the communal clamour. Its functions and duties are to carry on the administration according to the declared policy and programme of the party in power. A ministry, if it is to function successfully, must be a homogeneous body. While communal claims have to be recognised and communal interests safeguarded, national interests should have the prime importance. Congress accepted office to implement its election pledges to the nation. There is no meaning in communal

leaders raising the alarm that their interests are ignored. While Congressmen should be eager and willing to respect the legitimate claims of all communities, they cannot render their cabinets a repertory of communalists. If the leader who forms the cabinet refuses to take a member of a minority community as his colleague, however important that community may be, there is nothing to force him to alter his decision. The governor cannot dictate. He cannot force his nominees on the cabinet as it will be a negation of the principle of collective responsibility of the cabinet. The correct attitude the minorities should adopt towards any ministry is the one which Mr. Roche Victoria, the Indian Christian leader of Madras adopted towards the Madras ministry. He said that his community had in the Madras cabinet not one but ten representatives to look after its interests.

In Bombay, the Congress was willing to have two Muslim ministers in the cabinet but only one Muslim member satisfying the conditions of the Congress was forthcoming. In Orissa there is no Muslim minister at all, for there is none either returned on the Congress ticket or willing to sign the Congress pledge. The Muslims of this small province who form but two per cent. of the total

population waited in deputation on the Governor to represent their grievance. His Excellency received the deputation but was not impressed with its representations. He refused to interfere with the legitimate rights of the Chief Minister. A communique issued by the Orissa government on the subject spoke thus : "His Excellency received a number of representations from the Moslem associations of Orissa urging him to exercise his special powers to secure that one member of his council of ministers should be a Moslem. After careful consideration, His Excellency feels that it is not practicable in all circumstances to include a member of that community nor has he grounds to suppose the legitimate interests of the Moslem minority in Orissa will suffer as a consequence." These minority communities who appeal to the special powers of the Governor when they have their own countrymen to safeguard their interests are in fact doing a disservice to the country. In India, it appears the cringing, petitioning mentality dies hard. It is incomprehensible how a minority representative in the cabinet can be of any special service to his community. One wonders whether the Congress has not been too anxious, in some instances, to placate communalists by absorbing them into the

ministries after getting from them a pledge signed at the eleventh hour. This is not a desirable practice as it encourages only the communal clamour. While some of the new converts may develop into sincere Congressmen, there may be others who unable to overcome their natural leanings will try to thwart the activities of an otherwise homogeneous ministry by creating avoidable friction.

Another important feature of the Congress ministries is their collective responsibility. When there is collective responsibility, it is not possible for each individual minister to exercise his undisciplined individualism. During days of dyarchy, individual responsibility was perhaps the rule. It was not because the ministers then were in love with individual responsibility, but because they could not, for various reasons, evolve collective responsibility among themselves. Just before and after the introduction of provincial autonomy, one heard persons arguing in favour of individual responsibility of ministers to the governor and to the legislature. Their argument was based on the fact that minority representation and collective responsibility could not be reconciled with each other. They also pointed out that collective responsibility did not figure as a provision in the Constitution Act. At the Round Table Confer-

ence, the Indian representatives did indeed put forth collective responsibility as one of their demands but Sir Samuel Hoare opposed it on the ground that it was unknown to constitutions of the British Empire. According to him collective responsibility is a matter of constitutional practice and not a definite legal provision. Anyhow, when the Congress formed cabinets, the wholesome principle of collective responsibility alone was taken into consideration. What dyarchy failed to achieve in twenty years provincial autonomy achieved in no time. "It is only on the principle that absolute responsibility is undertaken by every member of the cabinet who, after a decision arrived at, remains a member of it that the joint responsibility of ministers to parliament can be upheld and one of the most essential principles of parliamentary responsibility established." If this view is accepted, it is impossible to concede the other view that the representative of a minority community in the cabinet should be free to pursue his own individual policy. He cannot indulge in unrestrained individualism but is on the other hand bound to bow down to and carry out the policy laid down by the cabinet as a whole. This again means communal interests have always to be subordinated to national interests. In

Congress ministries there is no place for aggressive communalists. Anyhow, despite what communalists said here and there, the Congress ministries were given a splendid reception by the general public. The leading journals in the country and the leaders of various political parties welcomed the cabinets with approval and approbation. Even if individual ministers in some of the cabinets are not particularly noted either for intellectual attainments or for their fidelity to the national cause and organisation, the cabinets as a whole represent a high level of efficiency and earnestness. Whatever may be their other defects, they reflect the stainless patriotism, spirit of service and sacrifice, and the revolutionary urge of an awakened nation which proclaims

“The world’s great age begins anew,

The golden years return”.

IV

THE CONGRESS LEGISLATURES

There are critics of the Congress who describe the Congress ministries as anything other than democratic. They say that the Congress has developed into a fascist organisation with dictators in every province where it controls the government. Let us see whether there is any substance in this criticism.

Democracy is government by discussion and consent. With a comfortable, overwhelming majority in the legislatures, the Congress governments have indeed the consent of the people to govern. The rule of the majority is the order of the day and the Congress governs because it is in the majority in eight provinces in India. Whatever may be the views of certain highly critical sections of the public regarding the activities of the Congress ministries, these views cannot reflect in the least on their representative character or on their competence to pass legislation for the whole of the country under them. A comprehensive programme was placed before the public and the

public approved it wholeheartedly. No political party worth the name can pretend to lay down beforehand the details of working of its programme. The party must have a certain amount of latitude to determine the details in the light of circumstances, and to respond easily to the calls of expediency. When once the electorate blessed the Congress manifesto with its acceptance and approval, it gave perfect freedom to the Congress to pursue the programme outlined in it in the manner which appealed to it most. The general consent to govern the country in the light of the party programme is there, and the Congress ministries are only using this consent for the realisation of the end in view. It is true, their methods are not acceptable to a certain section of the population ; that they are vehemently criticised for whatever they do, but this does not militate against their right to carry out their programme. No democratic ministry can afford to be guided solely and at every stage by what is known as public opinion outside the legislature. Democracy is at best only government by majority. Those who criticise the Congress ministries forget that democracy is not government by plebiscite.

The Congress stands for effecting a revolution in all spheres of Indian life, and hence it cannot

afford to stultify itself by being too cautious or chicken-hearted in the pursuit of its programme. The lethargy of ages has to be overcome and a new spirit has to be instilled into the nation. The peculiarity of India is that the millions in the villages who form ninety per cent. of the population have not yet found their voice. The Congress is not only their spokesman but also their champion and every measure of the Congress governments is intended to relieve them of their burden of poverty and ignorance and elevate them to the level of thinking and vocal human beings. Even in this belated attempt of the Congress to relieve the sufferings of the millions, to enable them to see the light as others see it, reactionaries discover a potential menace to their rights and are anxious to discredit the ministries in one way or another. If Congress has not the consent of the people to govern, who has ?

The Congress governments are indeed governments by consent. Perhaps the critic delighting in picking holes may say that these governments do not fulfil the second condition of democracy. There are persons who ask whether they are governments by discussion. The overwhelming majority they command in the legislature is said to stifle discussion and render them omnipo-

tent. They are stigmatised for the strength they have derived from the nation. Unfortunately, these critics do not seem to realise that in every parliamentary democracy, the government will invariably be in the majority capable of pushing its way through any kind of opposition. The opposition's aim is not to triumph over government but to generate discussion. Its duty is to criticise the government, to enlarge upon the defects of its policy, or measures and stimulate public opinion. "This minority is the first and the most effective critic of the government. The minority attacks the government because it denies the principles of its policy. The opposition will almost certainly be defeated because it is a minority. Its appeals are to the electorate. It will, at the next election ask the people to condemn the Government, and as a consequence to give a majority to the opposition. Because the Government is criticised it has to meet criticism. Because it must in the course of time defend itself in the constituencies it must persuade public opinion to move with it. The opposition is at once the alternative to the Government and a focus for the discontent of the people. Its position is almost as important as that of the Government. If there be no opposition, there is no democracy. His Majesty's oppo-

sition is no idle term. His Majesty needs an opposition as well as a Government". The failure in India to appreciate the proper function and duties of the opposition is largely responsible for the good deal of unreasonable criticism that is levelled at the Congress Governments. Democracy in practice is still far behind democracy in theory in this country.

In a legislature where the Government commands a triumphant majority, the opposition must invariably be defeated. When to its weakness in number is added a certain deplorable incoherence, the opposition is reduced to an unenviable plight. The strength of the opposition does not lie in the strength of its numbers alone ; for however strong it may be, it is still a minority. Its real strength lies in its power of debate, in its grasp of the details of the policy or measures of the Government, in its ability to rally public opinion around itself. In the Congress provinces generally, the opposition is tame and helpless and consequently often cheaply revengeful. The contrast between itself and the government is striking. While the government puts forth a solid front, the opposition makes itself conspicuous by the numerous divisions in itself. Unanimity of opinion is not one of the virtues of the opposition. Each petty party

with communal or sectional outlook and which does not agree with the government even in fundamentals calls itself an opposition. The pity is, that even in their differences with the government's policy they do not agree with one another. What binds them all together, if at all any thing binds them, is not any common policy, not any common agreement on controversial matters, but a common hatred or distrust of the Congress. The opposition may be best described as a collection of heterogeneous individuals. The result is, it is scarcely able ever to perform its duty. It does not generally contribute anything by way of intelligent or constructive criticism to the deliberations in the legislature. The numerous petty parties follow the line of least resistance and the line of least resistance is agreement with the government. Criticism either dwindles into an apology for criticism or degenerates into a questioning of motives and cheap revenge. Perhaps, it may be said that this picture errs on the side of exaggeration but if it is realised who constitute the opposition, there will be no room for surprise at all. The members of the opposition, with brilliant but rare exceptions, were in good old days either members of the government or its never failing supporters. Their one creed in life is to back

the winning horse. Those who associate government with subservient co-operation cannot discharge the duties of the opposition. To oppose the government, even constitutionally, is against the Sastras. If anyhow, opposition becomes inevitable, the numerous petty parties indulge in examining the motives of the government, for the government is the Congress, and an anathema to them. It is impossible for such a motley group as this to be either an alternative to the government, or a focus for the discontent of the people. The people themselves have no faith in it, and then it does not know how to brave the people and rouse their discontent.

There is yet another weakness from which the opposition suffers. It is painfully conscious of the fact that it does not represent the real people and that it has no right to speak on their behalf. The interests which it represents are generally opposed to any considerable change in the present state of society. No national outlook guides these interests and shapes their views. Though they constitute the opposition, their voice is ineffectual. Their arguments savour of special pleading. They have not yet realised that the opposition should be as public spirited as the government, that the difference between the opposition and the govern-

ment should be limited to method and procedure and not extend to aims and ideals. On the whole, the opposition offers an unedifying spectacle of conscious weakness, disunion, and demoralisation. This is not the kind of opposition we expect to find in a democratic legislature. A parliamentary opposition worth the name must be able to give the House the other point of view. It is uncharitable to think that because the government is strong, it will refuse to listen to reason. While the opposition will not be able to defeat the measures of the government, it can considerably amend, alter, and add to their substance. The opposition is responsible for fulfilling that one essential condition of democratic government, namely, discussion. It must start the discussion, maintain it at a high level, and thus enable the legislature and the public to appreciate all aspects of the question. In short, in all government by discussion the opposition is to play as important a part as those who are in power. Its responsibility is not any the less than that of the party in power, for it contributes as much to the good government of the country as the other does. Unfortunately, the opposition in the Congress provinces does not seem to play its part well but there is no room for pessimism. Experience will teach the various

minor parties the necessity for developing a certain amount of unity and cohesion at least when they meet in the legislature. So long as the Congress is in power, the opposition may not be able to do much and yet an attempt to win for the opposition its proper place in the legislature will be laudable indeed.

The weakness of the opposition, and its unrepresentative character have largely added to the self confidence of the party in power but there are persons who ask what the real function of the party behind the government is. They say that the members of the party are but the limbs of a huge machine and that they have no opportunity to exercise their individualism. These critics are prepared to agree that party cohesion and discipline are to be scrupulously maintained but they wonder why the members should be forced to surrender their individuality completely. Has the individual Congress legislator lost his identity in the party? Has he no views of his own, and if he has, is he free to give expression to them on the floor of the legislature? On questions of large policy agreement is necessary and desirable too, but in regard to details is it not possible for difference of opinion to exist? They insist that nothing should prevent the member from point-

ing out by way of constructive criticism or suggestion the defects in the legislative programme of his own party. By suppressing this legitimate freedom of the individual the party loses what it can otherwise gain. This enforced silence on the part of the members of the majority party detracts from the liveliness and usefulness of the legislature. The leaders of the party who run the government have all the talking to themselves, and they are invested with a power which, while it may conduce to quick and benevolent administration, renders the system of government something different from democracy. They add that the parliamentary activities of the Congress remind us of the activities of dictators in totalitarian states. The suppression of individuality, the forcing of public opinion through one approved channel, and the growing disregard, if not contempt, for views which do not agree with the official Congress view—these things do not suggest democracy. There are many right thinking persons as selfless in their patriotism as Congressmen themselves are, who view with misgivings and alarm the latter day developments in the Congress party. While every one acknowledges the sincerity and patriotism of the Congress members, few will subscribe to the view that the end in all

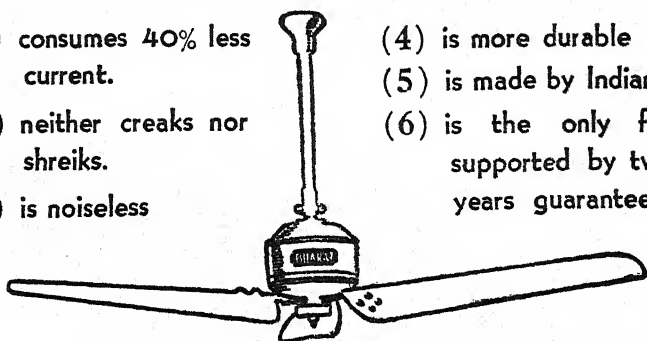
cases must justify the means. The political experiment we are having to-day is an experiment in democracy and it is the duty of Congressmen as well as others to see that it does not lead to fascism and its tyrannies.

Congressmen and the supporters of the Congress do not seem to attach much importance to the above charges. They say that the minority overwhelmed by the majority is disseminating views calculated to weaken the hold the latter has on the country. The evergrowing strength of the Congress is a source of alarm to the numerous petty parties which have no legitimate reason to exist to-day. The Congress, if it maintains its ideals and fulfils its programme, if it goes ahead emphasising always its national outlook, will ere long cease to be a mere political party and will develop into an organisation representing the whole nation. This is an end which spells disaster to communalists and vested interests. If they accuse the Congress of dictatorial tendencies, they do so only to raise a false alarm. The nation is not going to be frightened by it, for it knows the tactics of these "yes-men" who became the champions of freedom and democracy overnight.


This answer of Congressmen to the charges of fascism and dictatorship against their party is not

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sufficient to convince the non-party public. The general complaint that the Congress legislator has no individualism, that his sole duty is to support his leaders, is somehow gathering strength as 'days go by. There is nothing surprising in this. Organised party system is new in India and the public cannot be expected to realise all on a sudden the proper mode in which that system should be worked if it is to produce sound results. A knowledge of party organisation in general and the nature of the duties and functions of Congress legislators in particular, will certainly help in clearing the misunderstanding that prevails among the public to-day. To keep silent when one is not expected to speak does not mean that one has no individualism. Again, in the legislature every individual member of the party need not speak in support of or against a measure that comes before it. The essence of democracy is the party system and the leaders are the persons who are competent to speak on behalf of the party. The leaders give out not their personal views, but the views of their party. Each member of the party gives his consent to the leader to speak on his behalf. The party members evolve, after discussion and debate and compromise among themselves, a final view or policy which becomes the view or policy of the

party. In the legislature there is no necessity for all the members of a party to actually speak in support of the view ; it is enough if they support it. And in no legislature will it be possible for all members to speak on a given subject. The legislature is not intended for people to show off their eloquence. Congressmen may be silent, but that does not mean they have no views of their own and no individualism. They are first and last members of a great organised political party and as such have to abide by its rules and discipline.

There is yet another reason for the comparative silence of the Congress legislator. As the member of a great political party, he cannot afford to indulge in undisciplined individualism. He owes his position first to the party and then only to his personal qualifications. The electorate did not care for whom it voted so long as it knew that it voted for the Congress. If Congressmen were returned in a triumphant majority, it was not always for their personal attainments, but for their one qualification that they belonged to the Congress. The member returned on the Congress ticket should respect his obligations to the party first, and then alone seek an opportunity for the exercise of his individualism. He cannot go against the rules and discipline of the party ; if

he does, he will be disowned by it. Expulsion from party often means the ruin of one's political career, for the electorate will think twice before supporting a renegade, especially in India. Political turn-coats are not rare in this country and their fate has invariably been unenviable. Self interest, if not the higher principle of fidelity to one's party must restrain the member from indulging in his individualism too much. This is not the only reason why the Congress member plays a seemingly passive part in the legislature. He has in fact every facility to put forth his views in the party meetings. If he has individuality, it can find free scope there. The leaders of the party cannot afford to be dictators imposing their views on the individual members. What they place before the legislature is only the considered view of the party, the view which bears the stamp of every member's individuality. Difference of opinion in the legislature will weaken the government and lend strength to the opposition. It will lead to the demoralisation of the party and the defeat of the government. It is doubtful whether in a new election these individualists will get the support of the electorate. The opposition, if returned in a majority, will pay little heed to these egotists. Disowned by one party and not absorbed by an-

other, these individualists often fail to impress on the electorate their characteristic virtues. The result is they make an inglorious exit from the political arena. Even the Indian electorate has begun to realise that the individual by himself, alone, cannot do much for the country. Undisciplined individualism is fatal to party government. That the Congress has realised this sufficiently early is a hopeful sign, and augurs for the success of cabinet government in this country. While there is much for the opposition to learn, the Congress has already shown its ability to work successfully the machinery of parliamentary government. If there are parties which cannot sink their petty differences, and function as a united and efficient opposition, it is because there are still persons in the country who cannot sacrifice self for the common cause. They are more absorbed in advancing their personal interests than in promoting the well-being of the country. The Congress cannot be accused of dictatorial tendencies simply because there is a helpless opposition. It is poor satisfaction that one receives from condemning what one does not possess but on which one casts a longing, lingering look. Wanting unity among themselves the numerous petty parties in the country and their leaders are now making

a fetish of individualism.

Even in democratic, freedom-loving England, party discipline discourages unchecked individualism. "It is said that party organisation in parliament has become stricter in recent years. But in the common talk about party tyranny and about the despotism exercised by cabinets or whips, there is, to speak plainly, much nonsense and much cant. A member of parliament is not a puppet, but a human being, very human influenced by the same kind of considerations and actuated by the same kind of motives as his fellow mortals outside the walls of the House. He recognises the importance of combinations and organisation in politics as in other affairs of life ; he is willing to subordinate in many points his individual preferences and opinions to those of his leaders ; and he knows that he must submit to discipline if he is to be an effective member of an organised body. But no one knows better than a political leader what arts of persuasion, what tactics of conciliation and compromise are required to keep a party together. He knows that too severe a strain must not be put on party allegiance, that diversity of opinions within the party ranks must be recognised, and that on many times the lines of division between different opinions by

no means coincide with the lines of division between different political parties. And leaders and followers are alike aware that they cannot afford to disregard public opinion outside the assembly, that they must watch its variations, and fluctuations and guide their actions accordingly. Indeed the chief risk is that they should be too sensitive to currents and gusts of so-called public opinion as indicated in the very fallacious weather chart of the press." Those who look upon the West for inspiration and guidance will find it easy to realise that the Congress is but treading the path approved by the oldest democracy in the world.

Now we come to the speakership of the legislature. In those provinces where the Congress enjoys a majority in the legislature, the question whether the Speaker should be free from party allegiance or not has been largely discussed. Though some of the Speakers have not yet made any public statement of their attitude towards this question and are willing to follow the example of the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Speaker of the Assembly of the United Provinces brought it to the fore. He is of opinion that India should evolve her own conventions and not bind herself by conventions elsewhere. He is for complete freedom of action and opposes any kind

of imitation whatsoever.

The Premier of the United Provinces, while addressing the Assembly on the subject observed that it was the function of the Speaker to lay the foundations of conventions and precedents that would guide his successors. In his view, the Speaker has enough opportunities to discharge his duties in the House consistent with his work outside. His Speakership should not prevent him from taking part in political activities and in guiding his party at least in matters which are not likely to be the subjects of acute controversy on the floor of the House. This view was not appreciated by the opposition which emphasised the Speaker's complete independence of party connection. The Nawab of Chhattari suggested that the Speaker should follow the English tradition. Mr. Tandon, the Speaker then came out with his retort. "What is established convention in the House of Commons need not necessarily become the convention of a legislative assembly in this country. Our conventions must grow out of our requirements. In fact, I agreed to accept the Speakership on this distinct understanding". This attitude of the Speaker of the United Provinces Assembly caused considerable flutter in parliamentary circles. The subject was widely discussed

and arguments in support of either side were adduced. Even to-day the controversy cannot be said to have ended.

No one will wish the Speaker to be anything other than impartial. It is very essential that he should be able to command the confidence of the House. But how far allegiance to a party outside the legislature will influence his conduct within it and affect his impartiality is a matter which deserves earnest consideration. Much indeed depends on the character and personality of the Speaker. A person of character and integrity will not allow party considerations to bias his decisions as Speaker. Allegiance to the party which elevated him to the office need not necessarily imply party bias. The party nominated him to the office not to derive any special advantage from his biassed rulings, but because it found him worthy of the honour. The party leanings of a Speaker are as much detrimental to his reputation as to the reputation of the party itself. The knowledge that there are persons who suspect that his party connection will vitiate his rulings will be an ever-present reminder to him of his serious responsibility. The party itself will be anxious to show that for its triumphs in the legislature it does not depend upon the Speaker's bias. The theore-

tical independence of the Speaker has nothing to do with his practical impartiality. The golden mean of Pandit Pant is not an ideal beyond reach.

It should also be remembered that there is some difference between the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speaker of an Indian legislature. In India the Speaker owes his position almost always to his party. If he breaks off all connections with the party, what will be his political future? Is there any convention in India as in England that the Speaker should be returned unopposed in all subsequent elections? Is it likely that this convention will take root in India in the near future? Until this convention is evolved on Indian soil, the Speaker will find it difficult to break away from his party. And after all, Speakership in India is not and will not be the "prize" that it is in England. There is at present no incentive for the Indian Speaker to break off all allegiance with political parties. An ambitious member of a political party will not exchange his future chances and the thrills of political fights for a stipulated remuneration and a tame life. Anyhow, until the convention that the Speaker should be returned in all subsequent elections is evolved, he will continue to have his affinity with his party. If he can

succeed in impressing the House with his judicial outlook he is sure to command the confidence of even the most exacting opposition. It is unfair to attribute motives where there is none. India should develop her own conventions which are in keeping with the peculiarities of her political and social conditions. Parliamentary democracy is indeed the gift of the West but that does not mean that the East should not adapt it to suit her own genius. It is too early to criticise this or that convention as bad or undesirable. Freedom of thought, and power of detachment can exist along with particular political leanings. Congress Speakers will have no occasion to betray any undue partiality for the party, for the party can take care of itself. And yet, it is always advisable to adopt the wise practices of others. Local patriotism should not blind us to the advantages of a system which has stood the test of time and which has ensured for the Speaker the unquestioned obedience and the never-failing confidence of every individual member of the House. We may evolve our own conventions but they will not give the Indian Speaker a better position than the one which the Speaker of the House of Commons enjoys. It seems that England has said the last word on Speakership.

V

MINISTRIES AT WORK

There seems to be a certain amount of misunderstanding regarding the actual position of the Congress ministries within the Congress constitution. There are persons who characterise them as mere puppet ministries with absolutely no individuality or initiative of their own. They suggest that these ministries do not in any way conform to the accepted notion of parliamentary democracy ; that, instead of regulating their programme and policy according to the will of the electorate, they meekly submit to the guidance of a central caucus which has no relation to the electorate at all. This kind of criticism is certainly beside the mark, for it refuses to recognise the essential features of the Congress constitution and judges the ministries by standards which cannot as yet be applied to them in full.

It is true the voters are responsible for return-

ing Congressmen in large numbers to the legislature and the elected members are bound to satisfy the electorate ; but, at the same time it has to be realised that the franchise was exercised in favour of the Congress and not in favour of any individual for his particular merits or attainments. The victory in the elections was a victory to the Congress. In short, it was the Congress which set up candidates, fought the elections, and ultimately came out triumphant. The voters believed in the Congress because they felt their interests would be safe in its hands.

Even after the elections, the question of acceptance of office was settled not by individual Congressmen but by the Congress High Command. The Congress is at present engaged in winning freedom for the country and, as a well organised and popular political organisation, it has to follow a certain policy which will help it to achieve its goal. This policy has to be a national policy and all those who embrace its creed have to abide by that policy. It is worthwhile remembering that it was the Congress High Command which settled the question of acceptance of office and laid down the conditions under which the Congress should work the new constitution. It was the High Command, again, which negotiated with the Bri-

tish government and not individual Congress leaders in the provinces. The leaders formed their cabinets only under the direction of the High Command. The mere fact that in the formation of the cabinets, the usual parliamentary form was observed does not in any way militate against the competence of the High Command to be the final authority on all matters relating to the general policy of that great organisation.

Congress accepted office not with the object of working the Act, but with the object of wrecking it. Also, while working it with a view to wreck it, it has to undertake such measures of relief and reform as will tighten its hold on the masses and strengthen it in its fight for freedom. The policy which it has to follow is national and not provincial. Its aim is not the achievement of petty provincial amenities, but the regeneration of the whole country. This naturally requires that there should be a central organisation to supervise and control the working of the provincial ministries and to make sure that they follow the national policy. The Congress High Command—the Working Committee with its parliamentary sub-committee—is the central body which is entrusted with this work of supervision and control. The ministries cannot follow a line of action which is

not consonant with the declared policy of the Congress.

Lastly, in regard to the ameliorative programme of the Congress, it embraces within its fold everything that will ultimately help in the regeneration of the country. The election manifesto and the repeated declarations of the ideals of the Congress in its various annual sessions are a guidance to the Congress cabinets. While they are free to exercise their discretion on purely provincial matters they cannot ignore the large national policy and programme which they have to push through. No political party worth the name can exist without an open and declared programme and policy and it is its duty to strive for the fulfilment of that programme and policy when it comes into power. The Congress ministries are spared the trouble of evolving a programme for themselves for they have one ready before them to follow. This cannot be said to be a curtailment of initiative and enterprise. The working of the ministries at the present day will convince any one that they have as much freedom and power to do good as they want. If some provinces do not show so good a record as they should, the fault is largely that of the members who form the cabinet. The High

Command does not interfere in the internal affairs of the provincial governments ; it does not hustle the ministries into doing this and that, but it keeps a watch over the working of the ministries and gives them such advice as it deems good for them. There are no cast iron rules for the ministries to follow. Their only restraints are the acknowledged ideals of the Congress and the discipline they have to observe as Congressmen.

Unfortunately, even within the ranks of the Congress there is a section of opinion which views the activities of the Working Committee with suspicion and disapproval. There are persons who say that latterly the Committee has been developing into an omnipotent and omniscient body. They point out as examples of this tendency the Committee's interference in the affairs of the Central Provinces Ministry and the consequent resignation of Dr. Khare. These critics rarely realise that the reputation of the Congress to-day rests entirely on the strictness of the discipline that is enforced in its ranks. The temporary rise into positions of power does not exclude Congressmen from the necessity of being true to the organisation to which they belong. While every one would sympathise with Dr. Khare, few will commit the folly of attempting to defend his conduct.

During the C. P. ministerial muddle, one often heard the cry that democracy was in danger. The pity is that the champions of democracy did not realise that it was too early in India to think in terms of full-fledged democracy. The Congress is working the new constitution only as an experimental measure ; it has accepted office only under protest. Provincial autonomy is not full-fledged democracy and no Congressman is justified in violating discipline under the pretext that he is upholding the principles of democracy. When the Congress attains the ideal for which it is struggling, then will be the time for political logic-choppers to indulge in hair splitting arguments on democracy and dictatorship. The Khare episode, unfortunate though it was, vindicated, if vindication was necessary, the right of the High Command to interfere in the affairs of a ministry when the persons constituting the ministry threaten to undermine the prestige of the Congress. The High Command is responsible for the making and unmaking of the ministries ; for negotiating with the British government on matters of national policy. The ministries are but the agents of the High Command posted at strategic points to push through the national programme. If the High Command initiates a new



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policy according to which there should be no Congress ministries, it is the duty of all self-respecting ministers to resign.

In regard to purely local affairs, the ministries are to a certain extent controlled by the party in the legislature. The members of the party, being in touch with the electorate, are in a position to advise the ministers regarding the requirements of the people and how best they can be satisfied. They have a double duty to perform. First, as representatives of the people, they ought to acquaint the ministers with the people's problems and secondly, as members of the party in power, they have to support and defend the policy and actions of the ministers in the country. The ministers cannot ignore the members who do so much for them by way of propaganda. Conscious of its strength, the party may assume dictatorial powers and set a limit to the freedom and initiative of the ministers. The United Provinces Congress Assembly Party once threatened to censure the government for the appointment of a certain lawyer as Advocate-General. Its complaint was that the nominee of the ministry did not belong to the Congress party. The ministry found it hard to put up with this attitude of the party and refused to pay any heed to its threat. At last the ministry

had its own way and the party gave up its hostile attitude. The Assembly Congress Party in all the legislatures can be a veritable source of strength to the ministries if it keeps itself within limits and does not abuse its power by holding out threats to its own leaders. If the party wants to censure the ministry, it can do so by bringing a no-confidence motion against it in the Assembly. As it is, the organisation and discipline of the Congress do not allow such things to happen. The local parliamentary party cannot force the ministry to resign. It can only place its grievances before the High Command. It is the High Command's decision that determines the fate of ministries. This is indeed an anomalous position. The High Command should not insist upon the continuance of a ministry which cannot command the confidence of its followers. It is possible to send out those members of the ministry who are found wanting and invite others who are competent to take their place. The Working Committee should not constitute itself a tribunal to settle differences between ministers and their party in the legislature. The ministers should be able to command the confidence of the party directly, and not, as it is now, indirectly through the Working Committee. If the Working Committee intrudes

upon the sphere of the parliamentary party, there will occur a revolt which might even undo the work of the last fifty years. A split in the camp is a sign of weakness which the enemy will not be slow to exploit to his own advantage. Discipline should not degenerate into dictatorship.

Now comes the Governor. To some extent, the provincial ministries are subject to the control of the governors. Though, theoretically, the governors' powers, special, reserved, and discretionary are wide and elastic enough, in practice, they do not come into conflict with the normal and legitimate activities of the ministers. The governors have shown that they are eager and willing to help the ministries in everything that contributes to the well-being of the country. The atmosphere of distrust and suspicion has now cleared. The Congress is equally anxious not to involve itself in difficulties with the governors on minor grounds. The situation resulting from the hunger strike of prisoners in the Andamans and elsewhere was suggested as material for a constitutional crisis but the Working Committee declined to accept the suggestion. Again, when the ministerial crisis of U. P. and Bihar occurred, on the eve of the Congress session last year, it was made clear by the Working Committee that the

issue was local and that other Congress ministries were not to indulge in any sympathetic resignation. The Congress has accepted office to do what it can for the relief of the masses. Too many deadlocks, advocated by the socialists and by Mr. Subas Chandra Bose may serve as political stunts, but will not serve the purpose for which it has assumed office. The manner in which the Congress handled the U. P. and Bihar ministerial crisis and got over it with credit must convince any one that the High Command will not play up to the gallery but will maintain its reputation for statesmanship.

That there is no room for fear from the governors is evident from their new outlook. It is certainly to the good fortune of India that at this eventful period in her constitutional history she has as governors men who are essentially democratic in outlook. If provincial autonomy is a success to-day, it is largely due to the wide and liberal outlook of the governors. Sir Harry Haig, the Governor of the United Provinces spoke thus while addressing the Assembly :—"When everything is changed, the Governor too is not the Governor known to the former constitution. He has his own important functions and responsibilities but they are not the same as those exercised on previous conditions and I can no longer address

you now as I used to address the old legislature feeling I had some personal responsibility for the whole field of government's activities. The policy which is placed before you is the policy of the ministers and it cannot be carried out unless it receives the support of the majority of the members of the legislature." One peculiarity of the Governor's special powers is that they come into prominence only under exceptional circumstances. If the ministers can carry on the administration without creating these exceptional circumstances, the governor's special powers will in the long run fall into desuetude. "The ministers have the whip hand so long as they act within the four corners of the Act, no matter how distasteful their actions may be to the governors. It will be found upon examination that so long as the people remain non-violent, Congress ministers have enough freedom of action for national growth." Again, Mahatma Gandhi observed : "The special powers and safeguards come into play only when there is violence in the country or a clash between the minorities and the so-called majority community which is another word for violence. I detect in the Act a profound distrust of the nation's capacity to rule itself running through every section and the inevitable desire to perpetuate British

rule but at the same time a bold experiment of wooing the masses to the British side, and failing that, a resignation to their will to reject the British domination. The Congress has to convert these as missionaries and I have not got a shadow of doubt that if the Congress is true to the spirit of non-violence, non-co-operation and self-purification, it will succeed in its mission."

The Congress objective of independence can easily "be achieved by lawfully using the Act in a manner not expected by the framers, and by refraining from using it in the way intended by them." How far the Congress ministries keep the above advice in view, it is needless to discuss here. One thing is certain. The Congress ministries have more or less got accustomed to constitutional methods and rarely do they breathe fire and brimstone. The responsibility of office has taught them that there is considerable difference between theory and practice. The governors who were once looked upon as agents of British imperialism sent down to India to thwart her legitimate political aspirations have now turned out to be the best friends of the most revolutionary political party in the country. To-day, no one will ask for proof of goodwill and cordiality that exist between the governors and their ministers.

Dr. Rajan, the Minister for Public Health, Madras thus commented upon the relationship that existed between the ministers and the Governor in that province ; " His Excellency the Governor has assured us every co-operation and sympathy and I am not letting out any secret of the cabinet in informing you that His Excellency has been our friend, guide and philosopher. I am sure the atmosphere that is now prevailing would conduce to the best conditions for vast progress in the country. We are on very safe ground to-day in our decision in having accepted cabinet responsibility." The experience of ministers in other provinces is as encouraging as that of Mr. Rajan in Madras. Guide, philosopher and friend,—yes, the governors are all this to-day. It is gratifying to find that the Congress ministers have got over the obsession of deadlocks. If they remember Gandhiji's advice and act according to it, deadlocks will cease to threaten their career. " So far as I am concerned " wrote Gandhiji, " I would not create deadlocks, but would cheerfully face them when they are forced on me. I do not work the Act when I work so as to end it. It would be foolish of me having entered the legislature not to take all advantage I can of it and consolidate my position and strengthen it."

Who is more revolutionary, the Congressman who talks big of revolution or the bureaucratic Governor who approves all kinds of socialistic legislation and even prohibits the use of wine in parties at the Government House ? No wonder, the Muslims are railing against the governors as persons who are wooing the Congress. If there is any one in India who fully appreciates the ideals, aspirations, and the spirit of service and sacrifice of the Congress ministers, it is the Governor who enjoys unheard of powers and forgets to use them even when reminded by the brethren of the Muslim League.

VI

CONGRESS AND THE SERVICES

When the Congress undertook the administration of six out of the eleven provinces, there was considerable speculation regarding the attitude of the services and the ministries towards each other. The history of their mutual relationship has been anything but cordial for a long time. That organisation which for more than twenty years suffered at the hands of the bureaucracy was now assuming responsibility for the government of the major portion of the country. What reaction this would have on the services could only be a matter of speculation then. The oppressors and the oppressed were meeting for the first time in the same sphere and for a common purpose. The irony of the situation was that the oppressed found themselves in a position of vantage now. It was only natural that they should look upon each other with suspicion and distrust. The Congress had every reason to fear that the services

would stand in the way of its legitimate aspirations and thwart the execution of its national and revolutionary programme. The services on their part felt that the Congress ministers would use their newly acquired power to wreak vengeance on their erstwhile persecutors. The memory of the past conflict was still alive to render mutual confidence and co-operation difficult if not impossible. Fear on one side and suspicion on the other were inevitable. If the reforms were to succeed, both the services and the Congress ought to shed their antagonism and develop the spirit of harmony and understanding. Would the impossible happen? Would the lambs herd with the lions? Time alone could answer the question.

There was the wide spread belief in the country that given the chance, the Congress ministries would be able to achieve much. The services too were not unaware of the high expectations the people had of the Congress ministries. They knew that any delay or failure on the part of the Congress to go ahead with its constructive programme would be attributed to them, to their indifference or opposition. Whatever might be their views of the Congress, they did not like to incur this odium. The time spirit forced them to develop a new outlook. They realised that neither the

Governors nor the Secretary of State would be able to protect them against public opinion. The attitude of the Congress ministries also helped them considerably in their attempt to adapt themselves to the new order of things in the country. Those Congressmen who became ministers were not persons who would abuse their position by resorting to cheap revenge. Pettiness was never one of their weaknesses. They were magnanimous enough to forget the past, for they knew that their sufferings were the outcome of a certain policy of the government and not due to any personal malice on the part of the mere limbs of the government. In fact, they did not commit the error of confusing personalities with principles. Their attitude towards the services from the very beginning was such as to disarm suspicion. Almost all the Premiers, soon after taking the oath of office deemed it worthwhile to take the services into their confidence. Premier Pant thus addressed the services in his province : "The Congress Party had placed its programme before the electorate and had been returned with a definite mandate to implement that programme. He reminded them of the change of government from bureaucracy to democracy. People were now masters not only of the ministers but also of

the services. He looked to the services for their active assistance for carrying out that programme." The Orissa Premier spoke to them in a different vein but to the same effect. "You must have seen that there is fight for freedom going on in every country. I appeal to you who are Englishmen earnestly because you have tasted freedom to sympathise in our struggle for freedom. No nationalist, much less a Congressman, should be disliked because of his political views. Unlike ministers under the Montford Reforms, he was solely responsible to the Assembly. No ministry therefore can afford to be callous about public opinion as expressed in the press and on the platform and through members of the Assembly."

Leading newspapers also contributed their mite towards the evolution of good relations between the Congress and the services. The *Statesman* of Calcutta, one of the most level-headed journals in India in exhorting the services to develop a new outlook and adapt themselves to the new conditions made the following sensible observations : "The services should not forget their real position. Predominantly British, they will never, in spite of all the safeguards have the same privileged position that they have had; ultimately servants of the Crown, their immediate loyalties must centre on

cabinets which will normally be wholly Indian. They must also realise that procedure, policies and the bigger reforms in the provinces will have an all-India inspiration. The largely provincial experience of the services must adjust itself to ideas for which not the ministers but the Congress itself will be responsible. Dyarchy in no province called for such adjustment, because it was nowhere controlled by the central Working Committee of a political party. Those Madras civilians who have responded to Mr. Rajagopalachariar and are prepared to submit to a voluntary cut in their salaries deserve praise. It is an excellent example to set and will disarm critics all over India. No European in this country should be hard on Mr. Brackenbury, Chief Secretary in Madras for using a suit of Khaddar. The best of Indians, Congress and other, have never looked upon khaddar as a symbol of racial hatred. To them it is merely an encouragement of a rural industry and nothing more. The prejudice which many Europeans have felt against khaddar should now vanish. The Chief Secretary at Madras is a senior civilian; he could not have used khaddar for the fun of it or merely for the sake of notoriety. There is much to reflect when the highest I.C.S. official in a presidency uses material which many Europeans

and Indians have systematically banned since Mahatma Gandhi first brought it back to use. Gestures like this matter much more than words in a statute."

Sir John Anderson, the ex-Governor of Bengal in his Dacca speeches drew the attention of the civil services, especially of the Police to the attitude which they should cultivate towards the new government. He admitted to the police "being in possession of statutory special powers for protecting the interests of the services" but at the same time he made it plain that he shared it with the ministers. The services could approach him for protection not directly, but through the ministers only. This speech of the departing governor was applauded by the whole of India for it helped more than anything else to create the necessary atmosphere of cordiality between the services and the ministers. It also revealed that he understood the most sensitive spot in which the fears of the Congress centered.

That the Civil Services in India have adapted themselves to the new scheme of things and that they are functioning today as they ought to function have to be thankfully acknowledged. They have shown their willingness to co-operate with the ministers and render their efforts successful.

They have realised the sincerity and selflessness of the Congress ministers and have got rid of the fear and suspicion they had in the beginning. Now, they not only carry out the policy laid down by the ministers but also generously act as their guide and friend. The many measures, often bold, and sometimes revolutionary which have been pushed through the legislature in the course of the last twenty seven months prove, if proof is necessary, that the civil services are actively co-operating with the ministers in ushering in a new era of prosperity in the country. Under the influence of the Congress even the bureaucracy developed a certain amount of humanity.

A few words on the salaries of public servants will not be out of place here. The Congress decision on the subject was taken long ago at the Karachi session but the Working Committee reaffirmed it when Congressmen accepted office. This was the Committee's ruling : "Congress ministers' salaries should on no account exceed Rs. 500 per month, house allowance Rs. 100, per month, and motor allowance Rs. 150 per month. In the event of a minister not requiring the house allowance because he has a house of his own, the allowance should not be drawn. The minister who does not wish to draw any allowance need

not do so. The State has to provide cars for the ministers but no such special provision need be made unless it is considered necessary." In all the eight Congress provinces the ministers are drawing today only the salary and allowance fixed by the Working Committee.

The decision of the Congress surprised many and they lost no time in persuading the ministers to take a higher salary. The Rt. Hon'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastri advised the Madras ministers to draw at least Rs. 1,000 per month. "He would tell him (the Premier) with the weight of greater knowledge and experience that the Bill (salaries Bill) would be marked with approbation in many parts of the country, and in some parts with certain mingled misgivings." Misgivings there indeed were, but they certainly were not caused by the vow of poverty which the ministers took willingly. If Congressmen were going to be silly they had only to thank themselves. But they were also creating a tradition which would stand in the way of future aspirants to ministerial office taking a larger amount as salary. In India, the greatness and importance of an office are measured by its emoluments and when the Congress ministers said that they were satisfied with mere five hundred rupees for their services to the country, public opi-

nion, especially, in the higher altitudes was shocked. There sprang up the complaint that the Congress was lowering the standard of living in the country. And then there was the hint that the Congress ministers were making a terrible sacrifice, a hint to make the very ministers understand that all may not have the courage or convenience to follow their example. The Madras Premier answered his friendly critics and well wishers in his inimitable fashion thus : " I see no sacrifice in what we did. None of us drew a higher salary than what we are doing to-day. Let me say publicly that so far as we are concerned there is no sacrifice, and we claim to have made no sacrifice. As far as I know, in our country, if we judge the standard of life we should live by the standard of our classes, our community, our position in life, our traditional culture and other things and if we take that to be the standard of life, I say the salary we propose is very much higher." In regard to the suggestion that ministers should live "in a particular way," he said they had yielded to that particular life when they agreed to the use of a house and conveyance. " But I do not yield that we should eat more, and do other things and make the tax payer pay more." He also observed that it was not wise either for

the present ministers or for the future ministers to suddenly raise their standard of living because they were suddenly called to office for a short period. In future, he added, only non-officials would come to these places and things had to be adjusted accordingly. The ministers should not during their period of office spend Rs. 1000/- and as soon as they were turned out of office go away disgruntled and bitter in heart."

The Congress ministers accepted the low salary of Rs. 500 per month, not because the figure five hundred had any special sanctity for them. They did so for other and weightier reasons. The Congress had long ago realised that the scales of salaries in the country were abnormally high and that they had to be lowered considerably if the inequalities in social life were to be eliminated. The highly paid government servants are a class by themselves and they are responsible for artificially bolstering up the standard of living in certain spheres of social life. That emoluments in public services should bear a close and reasonable relation to the general level of the country's prosperity has been consistently ignored in this country. And besides, this bloated salary system has been responsible for the false notion that a high salary reflects the ability of the man who enjoys it.

These notions and values which took root in the early days of British rule have now developed a certain sacredness that any one who does anything which even remotely challenges them is looked upon either as a crank or as a revolutionary. The Karachi Congress after careful consideration arrived at the figure five hundred as the maximum salary payable to public servants, but the opportunity to enforce the decision came only now. Provincial autonomy and acceptance of office by the Congress brought what was once regarded as a mere ideal within the limits of practical possibility and achievement.

The Congress ministers inaugurated the campaign of simplicity in public life. The campaign is a challenge to those Indian bureaucrats who in the name of efficiency thoroughly demoralise themselves and the country by maintaining a standard of living which is not only "exotic but also extravagant." Indian ministers had been demanding the same salaries as British Executive Councillors on grounds of prestige but when it is realised what prestige they had before they found themselves elevated to the ministry, the absurdity of their claim becomes palpable. Many, if not all of them, were invariably mediocrities who made at some mofussil bar but a fraction of their

ministerial salary. It will be untrue to say that they rose to the position of ministers by sheer merit, that they arrived at the heights through the long and straight path. Many of them reached ministerial heights by walking along the devious byeways of communal patronage and intrigue. It was such persons who declared that ministerial prestige and dignity could be maintained only with three or four thousand rupees a month. The Congress ministers have now shown that ministerial dignity and prestige can be maintained unimpaired by drawing but a mere fraction of what the old ministers appropriated for themselves. In fact, they command more prestige and popularity than their predecessors as a result of their self abnegation. Those who still think that the reduction of ministerial salary is one of the stunts of the Congress woefully forget that the idea had its origin at the very inception of the national movement itself. The example set up by the Congress ministers is a forceful challenge to the entire economic structure of public administration in the country. The Congress Premier drawing five hundred rupees only and travelling third class on railway must indeed force the fat salaried civil servants both European and Indian to search their conscience. As regards the Englishman, there is

some justification for his fabulous emoluments, for he is here by divine appointment shouldering the White Man's burden. The Indian's claim is in no way justifiable. Example is better than precept and let us hope the example of the Congress ministers will have its salutary effect on the services before long.

VII

ACHIEVEMENTS

In days past when the Congress was but an un-official opposition to the established government of the day, hostile critics often sneered at it for its ideals and its programme. In their view the Congress was incapable of any constructive effort. Its ideals were impracticable and utopian. The promises which it so liberally gave were only intended to delude the public and were such as could never be fulfilled. The attitude of the Congress towards all constitutional and constructive efforts, as they were then understood to be, being one of uncompromising opposition, they said it could very well indulge in its dreams of impossible pictures of complete independence and universal prosperity. Unhappily for these critics, they never expected that the Congress would so suddenly change its front and adopt a new line of action, contrary to its well known principles of non-co-operation. . It was a veritable surprise to

these critics to find themselves deprived of their monopoly of constitutionalism by the visionary, unlawful Congress. If they felt disappointed at the loss of their long cherished privileges, they also derived some satisfaction from the thought that they had now an opportunity to expose the pretensions of the Congress. They believed that the Congress in its new role would be forced to betray the hollowness of its promises ; they conjured up the entertaining vision of a discomfited, crest-fallen Congress and in it found solace for their own terrible disappointment.

When one examines the Congress programme, one is struck with its comprehensiveness. If it is worked successfully, it will signify nothing less than a revolution in every field of activity in the country, political, social and economic. This programme is in fact the embodiment in itself of the hopes and aspirations of the nation. It was evolved after years of mature thought, slowly and gradually, and by the best brains in the country. That its authors possessed not merely intelligence but also considerable experience born of their intimate contact with the masses, must be the guarantee of its success. One may very well ask, why the Congress if it was so sure about the ultimate success of its programme did not endeavour

to pursue it earlier. The answer is simple. The one thing required for handling the programme is power and that was wanting then. The opportunity came with the inauguration of provincial autonomy under which the ministers enjoy certain wide powers—though it cannot be said that they are wide enough—to make a good start. They have already set about grappling their programme and there is every reason to hope that their efforts will be crowned with a fair measure of success.

The Congress programme is not merely comprehensive in scope but is also bold in spirit. It is a challenge to the old order of things. There is something defiant about it, something assertive. It has a rare convincing simplicity of its own. It conveys not merely a promise, but also implies the will to do, the grim determination to get things done. That the Congress ministries realised their mission fully from the very beginning of their career is now evident from their achievements. First of all, they had to vindicate the honour of the nation and the honour of the great organisation to which they belonged. The task was not easy ; it was delicate in the extreme ; but they did not flinch. Within a few days of their taking over the government, they ordered the release of their numerous comrades who were clapped up in

the various jails in the country. No action of the Congress ministries was so impressive as this which brought freedom to thousands of sufferers and joy to hundreds of homes. Many a desolate home after years of unrelieved sorrow felt for the first time the joys of reunion. The country was thrilled. The spirit of freedom, of hope and joy was in the air. Men and women living in rural India now felt that a great change had come over the country. They realised that the government of the country was theirs, that men who shared their sorrows and sufferings were guiding the destinies of the nation. These simple, unsophisticated people even believed that Congress had won Swaraj. They were not far wrong. Villagers never argue about political theories ; they judge a government by what it does. When they saw prisoners coming out of jail and that under the orders of the Congress Governments, they naturally believed that Swaraj had come. Nothing raised the Congress so much in the estimation of the rural population as this bold policy of releasing political prisoners.

The release of political prisoners was soon followed by the return of press securities forfeited during the days of civil disobedience. The Madras order on the subject alone contained a

note of warning. "In withdrawing the notices government desire that keepers of presses and publishers or editors of newspapers concerned should understand that the refund of deposits is not to be interpreted as licence to infringe the law." Extremist Congressmen, generally known as socialists, and leftwingers, resented this qualifying clause. They said that it took away the grace out of an otherwise generous and magnanimous gesture. They complained that there was a ring of bureaucracy in the order which jarred against the true Congress spirit. These malcontents did not realise that the author of this order and its qualifying clause had in him much more of the Congress spirit than any one of them. The protests and complaints were scarcely noticed by the large majority of Congressmen. In Bombay, the Home Minister, by a stroke of the pen lifted the ban on two hundred and twenty seven organisations—a record figure—in one day and returned the press securities forfeited by many newspapers during the last satyagraha struggle. The other Congress Governments followed.

The Congress flag and the song Vande Mataram also came into their own. In every province the ban on them was lifted. The Madras order will serve as a specimen. "Various orders have been

issued by government from time to time prohibiting the hoisting and flying of the flag used by the Indian National Congress on buildings belonging to or occupied by municipal councils, local boards etc. After a careful examination of the whole position the government have directed not to prohibit the flying or hoisting of the said flag on such buildings. All previous orders on the subject are cancelled." Unfortunately, some over-enthusiastic Congressmen began to shout that the Congress flag was the national flag and that it should be hoisted on all public buildings. The Muslim Leaguers, the Hindu Mahasabhaites, and other communal parties challenged this claim of Congressmen to use the Congress flag as a national flag and protested against its being hoisted on public buildings. The Congressmen being in the majority in many of the municipalities and local boards, the protests of these parties were of no avail. Then they began to clamour for the hoisting of their own party flags on the same buildings, along with the Congress flag. The controversy grew bitter and caused considerable communal tension. A few heads were broken here and there and much blood too was shed. At last, the Congress governments came out with another order by which they prohibited the hoisting of the

flag over any public building if it was not unanimously supported by the members of that public body. The flag controversy now seems to have come to an end.

The provincial assemblies began their session with the singing of Vande Mataram. The policeman no more flourished his lathi, the custodians of law and order no longer spent sleepless nights thinking of revolution and bloodshed. The Government of the Central Provinces went one step farther than the other Congress governments. It issued a circular in which all police authorities were asked to pay due respect to the national flag, and also to stand up whenever national songs were sung at public functions. Here too, over-enthusiasm created trouble. The Muslim League which was anxiously awaiting an opportunity to indict the Congress as a Hindu Organisation made successful capital out of this song. It staged many a protest and forced the Congress to alter certain portions of the song which were supposed to be objectionable to Muslim sentiments. Now-a-days, one does not hear much of this song in public functions, though congressmen never let slip an opportunity to sing it. In spite of Muslim protest, the song still continues to be the most popular song in India. Congressmen accepted office

with a bang. The fairy tale has come true in "servile Madras, in traditional U. P. ; in civil and military Poona, and in bourgeois Bombay." During the first fortnight of the ministries' tenure of office, "they condensed the work of a whole year in point of time and perhaps of a whole decade in point of spirit."

Having discharged the first duty of redeeming the national honour and safeguarding the fundamental rights of the people, the Congress ministers set about tackling the constructive items on their programme. It is too early to assess their achievements. Their first budgets though prepared in haste were not without the essential Congress touch. They were then just feeling their way and yet they showed how keenly they were alive to the many pressing problems which confronted the country. Any important change in the social and economic condition of the masses can be brought about only by legislation, and legislation is necessarily a slow process. Anyhow the Congress ministries did not wish to leave things alone till legislation was passed. What relief they could give by means of executive orders, they gave promptly. They plunged into their work in all earnestness and sincerity and produced a tremendous stir in the slow-moving, apathetic world

of officialdom. Some did really get alarmed at their speed while others, especially the Socialists, mildly accused them of indolence. To the average citizen, the work of the ministries appeared to be sufficiently brisk and even hostile critics candidly acknowledged the ability and public spirit of the ministers. Not that they won universal praise for all that they said and did. The leaders of defunct parties, and vested interests on the verge of nemesis, to keep themselves alive did indeed indulge in the thankless task of picking holes ; they raised the alarm that radicalism and communism were sweeping the country, but no one seemed to take them seriously. The Congress governments steadily pursued their policy confident of the strength and support of the masses behind them.

The plight of the peasants was what attracted the attention of the Congress ministers first. In all Congress provinces temporary relief was given to the peasantry by way of governmental orders and measures of permanent relief were taken up for consideration. Madras gave the lead by passing a substantial measure of relief in the Assembly. The Debt Relief Bill, in spite of its drawbacks, was certainly a piece of legislation calculated to afford protection and relief to the

indebted agriculturists. There was considerable opposition to the measure from many quarters and the bill when it ultimately emerged from the legislature had undergone considerable change. Vested interests made a hue and cry that they were being swept off by socialism, while a different section attacked the measure on legal and technical grounds. There were also attempts to get the bill vetoed by the Viceroy. The opposition characterised it as a piece of hasty and discriminatory legislation but in spite of all this the Bill found its way into the statute book. After all, the Bill does not pretend to solve the fundamental problem of the peasant which is none other than a substantial reduction in rent and revenue along with fixity of tenure, but as a first instalment of relief it justifies itself fully. The Congress ministries kept themselves clear of their own extremist followers who advocated and still advocate the annihilation of the landowners. From the beginning, compromise was the key note of Congress legislation.

Premier Pant of the United Provinces outlined a scheme of agrarian reform which was based entirely on the Congress election manifesto. His proposal favouring non-collection of rent arrears caused a flutter in the ranks of the Zemindars.

some of whom even brought an adjournment motion to discuss it. At the eleventh hour, this attempt was given up and the Premier's statement was adopted without any modification. The Nawab of Chhattari found in this a golden opportunity to form a special party to protect the interests of the Zemindars but he scarcely realised that this party would have very little effect on the political line up of the house. There is now a tenancy bill before the U. P. legislature which if passed will almost revolutionise the relation between landlord and peasant in the province. There is much opposition to this bill from the landowning classes which the ministry cannot ignore, while its own supporters because of their extravagant and revolutionary claims have made it almost impossible for it to go ahead with its programme. In other provinces also, legislation intended to relieve the burden of the agriculturists has been attempted with a fair measure of success. Agrarian reform has begun, but as yet, only the fringe of the problem has been touched. In Madras, Bihar, Orissa, and Central Provinces, and Bombay, vigorous attempts are being made to bring about a reorientation of policy regarding land and the peasant.

Congress in office was taken advantage of by

the peasants known in northern and central India as kisans. They realised that conditions were favourable for putting forth their demands and consequently organised themselves well. The Socialists stood behind them and lent them their support. With this new accession of strength, the kisans became sufficiently vocal and even aggressive in their demands. While the Congress governments are sympathetically inclined towards the peasants, they do not find their way to approve fully the methods adopted by the kisan organisations to attain their objective. Orthodox Congress leaders with their natural suspicion of left-wingers find it hard to view the new developments with favour. The growing strength of the kisans and the partiality of Congress governments for them caused considerable misgivings in the ranks of the zemindars and landlords who in their turn began to organise parties of their own to safeguard their rights. An intelligent and progressive section of the zemindars is fully alive to the reasonableness of the peasants' demands and it has expressed its willingness to co-operate with the government in alleviating their sufferings. The Maharaja of Dharbhanga observed in the course of one of his speeches that he welcomed the Premier's (Bihar) proposals and that he was

glad that the Premier "has no ill-will or malice against the class he had the honour to belong." "While he and his brethren were prepared to lend their co-operation to any reasonable scheme" of the government, they would not approve of the proposal to abolish zamindaries. They recognise the necessity to adapt themselves to modern conditions but are sternly opposed to any socialistic doctrine which will challenge their time-honoured and traditional rights. Whatever may be the view of the zemindars regarding the recent developments, it is certain they cannot afford to maintain the position which they have been holding till now. The masses have grown conscious of their place in the economic and political life of the country. The kisan marchers in U. P. and Bihar are a new phenomenon. Their strength and discipline and the guidance and advice they receive from the educated youths who are the champions of socialism have made their position in the country sufficiently important. In them we find the reawakening of real India. The Congress, whatever may be the views of its orthodox members cannot afford to ignore them or make light of their demands. Kisan marchers invading assembly halls are the order of the day. The slightest indifference on the part of the Congress

governments to meet their legitimate demands will have serious reactions on the Congress organisation itself. The Socialists and the Communists who are the real brains behind this kisan movement, though few in number, are intelligent, brave and daring. They do not believe in the non-violent policy of the Congress. They seek inspiration from Russia and are never weary of asserting that an economic revolution alone can lead to India's freedom. The Congress has to play a very delicate and often difficult part in this struggle between the peasants and the landlords. The Congress governments will show their essential statemanship in the handling of this problem. Revolution is not in the blood of the Indian but he is not impervious to influence. A false or doubtful step will lead to a split in the camp which in its turn will lead to consequences, which to say the least, will be disastrous. Socialism is gathering strength every day and unless the Congress adapts itself to the new circumstances it will be overwhelmed by the socialist group before long. In a way, the Congress is reaping the fruit of the glorious promises which it so liberally gave when the British government was in power. As yet, there is no room for despair, for the Congress governments are doing everything they can

within the frame work of the Act to bring about a new order of things in the country. One who cares to study the trend of economic legislation in the country will be convinced of the fact that the Congress governments have achieved in two years what the British government could not in the course of a century and a half.

Now we come to prohibition. "Inasmuch as prohibition has been one of the chief planks of the Congress since the inauguration of the non-co-operation movement in 1922, and thousands of men and women have had to suffer imprisonment and physical injury in furtherance of the cause, the Working Committee is of opinion that it is incumbent on the Congress ministries to work to this end. The Committee expects them to bring about total prohibition in their respective provinces in three years. The Committee appeals to the ministers in other provinces and to the Indian States also to adopt this programme of moral and social uplift of the people." Mahatma Gandhi defined prohibition thus : "Total prohibition is prohibition of the sale of intoxicating drinks and drugs except under medical prescription by practitioners licensed for the purpose and to be purchased only at government depots maintained for it. Foreign liquor in a prescribed quantity may

be imported for the use of Europeans who cannot or will not do without their drink. These will also be sold in bottles in selected areas and under authorised certificates. Hotels and restaurants will cease to sell intoxicating drinks."

It is characteristic of India that its nationalism should embrace within itself not merely the desire for political freedom, but also the yearning for moral and religious awakening. Politics in India cannot be put into a compartment by themselves ; that is to say, pure politics are unknown in this country. Anything that affects the well being of the people, moral, social or religious becomes ultimately merged in politics. Indian nationalism is a composite movement and is only another name for Indian renaissance. Nationalism aims here not only at political freedom but also at moral, religious and social reform. The one is not more important than another ; without the one the others do not signify anything. The apostles of Indian nationalism dreamt of an India politically free, devout in religion, and pure in morals. The two great communities in India, Hindus and Muslims, alike look upon drink as a curse on society. The drink habit has no religious sanction behind it. Add to this, the wretchedness, the misery and the poverty that it brings upon thousands of

families and it is easy to appreciate why the makers of the India that is to be are so anxious to wipe out this evil from the country. A free India must be free from everything that lowers human dignity. The abolition of drink will ensure the happiness of many a home and enable millions of starving people to taste of the pleasures of good living. Ultimately, it will help in the evolution of an India strong enough to protect her honour and her rights. The masses weaned away from this degrading temptation will develop a clean and noble outlook and will be able to take part effectively in the struggle for freedom. The vision is both beautiful and noble, but will it, unlike visions equally noble and beautiful refuse to recede farther and farther when we march towards it nearer and nearer ? Can the removal of a temptation be the same as the overcoming of a temptation ? These are difficult questions to answer. Anyhow, the champions of prohibition do not worry themselves with these questions. They are hopeful of success. Even if they fail, the attempt is worth making. Pessimism is not the order of the day.

Madras took the lead in prohibition. Within three months of assuming responsibility for the government of the province, Mr. Rajagopalachari was able to start the campaign against drink.

Here was an opportunity for him to fulfil one of his most cherished ideals in life. The Bill was, in the words of the opposition rushed through the Assembly and on October 1, 1937, Salem district went dry, amidst universal enthusiasm. An apology for prohibition had been tried during the regime of the Justice Party but the whole thing ended in dismal failure. The government then came to the inevitable conclusion that drink is one of the unavoidable evils society clings to with ardour. The truth is, the government had then neither the moral earnestness nor the power of persuasion essential for the success of any scheme of social reform. If at all they tried the experiment, it was only as a sort of concession to public opinion. Also, the success of prohibition would have been ruinous to the transferred half under dyarchy. The ministers with absolutely no power to find fresh sources of revenue would have had to starve the few departments under their control. To the credit of that distinguished regime must it be said that it never tried to bring about its own ruin. The Congress undertook to govern the country under different auspices. Unlike the ministers under dyarchy, they have certain wide powers of control over income and expenditure. More than this, the Congress ministries are

pledged to effect drastic retrenchment under all heads of expenditure. Lastly, prohibition is a major item on the programme of the Congress and whatever may be its ultimate financial implications, the ministries have to push it through. Mr. C. Rajagopalachari deserves to be congratulated on his boldness in introducing prohibition at so early a stage of his premiership. He showed the way for others elsewhere. That the Salem experiment is a success is proved by reports from competent authorities connected with it there and by the extension of prohibition to four more districts. Crimes have gone down ; workers in mills and factories are steady and regular in their attendance ; brawls and scuffles among them have considerably gone down in number ; their family budgets reveal increasing expenditure on food and clothing. The demon of drink with her attendants poverty and misery has given place to the goddess of prosperity. Peace and good cheer now reign in families where drunken brawls once made women and children miserable. If the government have lost heavily, the people have gained considerably, not only in material prosperity but also in moral good.

This is an era of pleasant surprises in India. Impossible things are happening before our very

eyes. Every Congress province is the scene of some notable achievement, some revolutionary change, which promises to usher in the greater India of the future, but nothing can compare with this campaign of prohibition which ensures happiness to the very people who have been for ages left alone to wallow in want and misery. Every Congress province caught the example of Madras and to-day, prohibition is actively enforced in select areas in all of them. In a way, Bombay is bolder than Madras. Two of the chief industrial cities of the presidency, Ahmedabad and Bombay are dry to-day. The Bombay ministry declared the city of Bombay a dry area on the first day of August last. The venture is bold and ambitious and if it succeeds, the success of prohibition is assured in India. Even Sind, where the ministry is not a Congress one, and Assam have taken up this question in right earnest. It is hoped that all the Congress provinces will go dry within another two years.

One aspect of prohibition, and that an important one, remains yet to be noticed. The success of prohibition will naturally affect the resources of the governments seriously. Not only will it completely wipe off one major source of revenue, but it will also put the governments to a good deal of

recurring expenditure. The staff required for enforcing prohibition will have to be provided for from other sources of revenue. Education which is to-day largely financed out of the proceeds of excise revenue will be adversely affected. Other nation building departments of the government will also suffer heavily. If at all the provincial governments want to make up this loss in revenue, there are only two courses open to them,—retrenchment of expenditure on the administrative machinery, and fresh taxation. Retrenchment is good in itself but has little scope and will not yield much. Unfortunately, there is very little chance of the Congress ideal of reduced salaries being realised in the near future. Many changes will come in India naturally ; many others will be accomplished by means of legislation ; but a change in the scale of salaries will become possible only through revolution. Naturally then, the Congress governments have to resort to taxation for raising the revenue which will make up the loss under excise. Even here, they have only a limited field to move about. How they are going to achieve this is only partially known. Neither the High Command, nor the provincial ministries have formulated a definite scheme of taxation. From the manner in which they are introducing new taxes

one is forced to conclude that they have a scheme before them. Property tax, petrol tax, tobacco tax, sales tax, employment tax, and a tax on agricultural income—these are some of the taxes which have already made their appearance. The fall in income actual and prospective has not damped the enthusiasm of the Congress ministers. Being a matter which affects all the provinces, the High Command will be the ultimate judge of the policy to be pursued on this behalf. Whatever may be the form of the final proposals, it is sure it will have a socialistic bias. Those who can afford to pay will have to pay more. Already the richer classes have begun to raise their voice in protest. What reaction these new taxes will have on the reputation of the Congress and the hold it has on the country cannot be predicted now. The opposition of the rich will not materially affect the chances of the Congress in the ensuing elections because the ordinary middle class voters who are always on the side of the Congress are decidedly in the majority.

There are many, who believe rightly or wrongly that all the ills the country is subject to can be traced to the system of education that is prevailing to-day. English education, according to them, has a denationalising effect and develops in our youths

a feeling of inferiority complex. There is yet another complaint. The education that is imparted to the Indian youth is not calculated to fit him for anything in life other than the dull drudgery at the desk. The schools and colleges are said to manufacture year in and year out cringing, submissive clerks without number who go about the country knocking at doors which never open and who stir up discontent in an otherwise happy and contented society. "Educational policy in this country was formulated under different circumstances. It was primarily designed by the government to manufacture clerks for their offices. Till the Minto-Morley Reforms were passed, no question of policy or administration was in the hands of the children of the soil. They were no doubt used by the powers that be for carrying out the object they had in view. They were never trained in the art of administration." These are the words of a Minister for education. The system of education and the policy governing it have never wholly been in the interests of the country, and yet one cannot blindly agree with everything that is said against English education. When Macaulay inaugurated the present system of education, his idea was not merely to get efficient clerks manufactured, but also to enable In-

dians to qualify themselves for taking an increasing share in the government of their country. He hoped that Indians would profit by their intimate contact with the culture and civilization of the West. To-day, any dispassionate critic will admit that the two-fold aims of Macaulay have been realised. The learned professions and high government offices have many brilliant Indians who in point of ability and accomplishments are not a whit behind the imported Englishman. English education, in spite of all its defects, has enabled Indians to rub shoulders with their political masters in their own spheres. The inferiority complex visible in the early years of British rule does no longer exist. To-day, no one looks upon the Englishmen, whatever his pretensions might be, as a being from another world. The birth of the Indian National Congress a half century ago, with its objective of national freedom was in effect a triumph of English education in India. England enabled India to know herself. The system of education produced results which were not perhaps anticipated when it was originally inaugurated. The spirit of nationalism which began to sweep the country from the early years of this century owed much to England and to English education. If English education once developed the

slave mentality in Indians, it also inspired in them the love of country later. After all, English education has more than a soul of goodness in it. It set free those hopes, those ideals which made for the awakening of India. There is no exaggeration in saying that England revealed India to herself.

English education does not seem to satisfy the nationalists and they are anxious to evolve a new system which will bring knowledge within the reach of all. Even in the past, there had been attempts to break away from the existing system but we know now what those attempts ultimately meant. National schools and colleges, started to give a new orientation to educational policy followed meekly the system that was prevalent in the country. They were national only in name. If there was any difference between them and the ordinary institutions, it was in the importance they paid to the vernacular. This departure from existing practice, this relegation of English to the background, or at least to the second place did not meet with the approval of all sections of the public. The Benares Hindu University, the Muslim University, the Osmania University at Hyderabad and a few other institutions of aggressive nationalism which are supposed to give education

a new method and a new aim do not seem to have succeeded in their ostensible mission. The older universities like Madras, Bombay and Calcutta are even to-day the leading universities in India. English still maintains its hold on the people and whatever may be the new system, it is doubtful whether it can completely ignore the English language. The vernaculars must be given their proper place in the educational curriculum but this can be done without completely eliminating English from it. It is too early to say anything on the many schemes which are before the provincial governments.

The introduction of a system of education which will enable the teeming millions of India to become literate is fraught with considerable difficulty. Gandhiji has his own suggestions to offer on this behalf. "By education, I mean an all round drawing out of the best in the child and man, body, and mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is only one of the means whereby men and women can be educated. Literacy itself is no education. But as a nation, we are so backward in education that we cannot hope to fulfil our obligations to the nation in this respect in a given time during this generation if the programme is to depend on

money. I have therefore made bold, even at the risk of losing all reputation for constructive ability to suggest that education should be self supporting. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it useful handicrafts and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training. Thus every school can be made self supporting, the condition being that the State takes over the manufactures of these schools."

Here, we have the essence of the Wardha scheme of education. Many comments and criticisms have already appeared in the press and if one is free to draw any conclusion from them, it is that the older generation of educationists is not very enthusiastic about it at all. The suggestion that education should be imparted through crafts does not seem to have recommended itself to many. Even the layman does not promptly appreciate the idea that schools should be miniature workshops. This scheme, they say, does not take into consideration the varying tastes and aptitudes of the children, that it proposes to substitute one kind of standardisation for another. Again, they point out that too much emphasis on the craft side of education is likely to thwart the intellectual and emotional development of children. It is indeed a desirable thing to have a self supporting nation,

but a self supporting nation need not necessarily be a nation of craftsmen alone. What our educational system should aim at is the training up of the citizen. While every child should be given an opportunity to eke out a living for himself when he gets out of the school, he should not be made unfit for any other thing which requires the exercise of the intellectual and emotional qualities. There is also considerable difference of opinion on the possibility of making the schools self supporting. The State will have to incur the necessary expenditure for their upkeep. And is it possible to imagine that articles produced in these schools will be able to command a ready market? We know the fate of the Khadi industry now. In spite of the tireless propaganda carried on on behalf of Khadi during the last so many years, it has not yet become so popular as it ought to have become. Even in Wardha, the seat of Gandhiji, one scarcely ever sees a fully khaddar clad man. The State cannot venture on a scheme whose advantages are uncertain, but whose defects are known, on the simple ground that it promises to make education self supporting. While educational reform is both urgent and essential, should it be such as will mark a sudden break with the past? Changes in educational system must be

gradual and not abrupt. The public must have sufficient time to adapt itself to the new order of things. Perhaps the scheme fails to convince because of its astounding novelty. If many criticise the scheme because it is a Congress scheme, many others support it because it is Gandhiji's scheme. Both attitudes are wrong. There is anyhow no harm in giving the scheme a fair trial. It will be advantageous to know what its possibilities are before it is adopted as a universal system. It is gratifying to find that even the Congress ministries have not been over anxious to bring the scheme into force on a large scale in their provinces.

The Premier of the Central Provinces has introduced a scheme in the province which is not much different from the Wardha scheme. It has been blessed by Mahatma Gandhi. It aims at making primary education free, and compulsory in every village where a school exists to-day. It suggests further that the present eleven years' course for the Matriculation should be reduced to ten years. After Matriculation, every student will be required to devote one year to free teaching and social service in a village without which he will not be eligible for the certificate. The same condition applies to the student who completes his college career. The cost of boarding and lodging will be

borne by the government. Along with these changes in the present system, there is also going to be a novel and permanent scheme. According to this, every village where about fifty boys and girls of school going age are available, will have a Vidya Mandir (Temple of Learning). To this a plot of land will be assigned, sufficient in area to give the teacher a living wage. There will be a trust committee of the school elected by the villagers on an adult franchise basis. The co-operative department will be consulted to see if education societies on co-operative basis can be formed. There will be a reserve fund formed out of the net income of the trust to be utilised in case of famine and scarcity. Some subsidiary handicrafts and cottage industries such as spinning and weaving, rope or newai making will also be introduced in these Vidya Mandirs. The scheme has now been put into operation on a small scale. It did not fail to make some noise especially when the Muslims realised that the word Mandir means temple. As usual, communalism came in to play and at one time the Muslim league even organised Satiagraha before the Secretariat. The government refused to change the word, but allowed the Muslim to call institutions especially set apart for them by the Urdu equivalent. It does

not appear that the controversy has completely subsided though much of its original vigour has now vanished. It is a pity that every action of the Congress governments is looked upon by communalists with suspicion.

The report on the Vidya Mandir scheme points out that in hundred years literacy has gone up only by 2.2 per cent. and that eighty per cent. of the population of the province is illiterate. To bring about intellectual and national revolution cent. per cent. literacy is essential, and must be attained within a fixed period. With the present financial resources of the government it is impossible to get money out of its revenues. Therefore, the other alternative to the endowment scheme has to be adopted, namely, realisation in kind, like Kotwari dues from the tenants and malguzars in proportion to the land they hold and as much as will be sufficient to maintain the teachers. The minister is of opinion that the above scheme if properly worked will solve the problem of illiteracy within a fixed time. The other provinces are also busy evolving schemes of their own. The scheme of one province must necessarily differ from the scheme of another but at least in essentials they are bound to agree. The Wardha scheme, with its seven years of basic education, with slight changes to suit local condi-

tions bids fair to supplant the existing system in India—this is what one is able to gather from the trend of public opinion and ministerial policy in the provinces. The problem of finance is a common problem and the only scheme which pretends to meet it is the Wardha scheme. Whether it will make good the high expectations held of it, by its admirers or not can only be a matter of speculation now. India is in a period of transition. She is turning over a new leaf in her long and chequered history. Revolutionary changes are inevitable in every sphere of human activity and if in the sphere of education the Wardha scheme even partially meets this urge and contributes to the awakening of the slumbering rural India, it will have nobly fulfilled its purpose.

The high cost of education has forced the Congress ministers to devise some method by which illiteracy can be wiped out of the country. Dr. Mahmud, Education Minister of Bihar, hit at the novel idea of a literacy campaign. He inaugurated a movement which has now caught the attention of the whole of India. Bihar, Punjab, U. P. and Bombay, all have their literacy campaigns to-day. All popular organisations are pressed into the service of this campaign which is making considerable headway now. In U. P. the government recently

opened 1,700 basic schools and installed radio receivers in important villages. Fortunately for us, there is no unhealthy rivalry between the Congress and non-Congress governments in this sphere. All of them are alike enthusiastic in solving the most formidable problem of stamping out illiteracy in India.

Closely allied to the reorganisation of education is the problem of Hindi, especially in the south. The compulsory study of Hindi is advocated by nationalists on the ground that a common language is essential for national unity and solidarity. At present, the southerner is a stranger in every other province except his own and even in his own province he has often to pass for a deaf and dumb man. The Congress realised the importance of a national language long ago and inaugurated the Hindi campaign. Hindi being the language of the major portion of the Indian people its claim to be the national language of the country is unquestioned and unquestionable. It is easier to make it the common language of India than any other language spoken only by small sections of the population here and there. To-day, very few in India deny the advantage of a common language, but there are persons who refuse to recognise the claim of Hindi to that rare

honour. Some say that we have in English a language which serves the purpose of a common all-India language, and there is no justification in displacing it by another which does not possess all its virtues. They contend that English is the international language and that it alone can keep us in touch with what passes in the world beyond. Even a free India cannot afford to give up completely the study of English, for that will mean unenviable isolation. Those who oppose the claim of English for becoming the national or common language of India tell us that English has made very little progress in the country. They say, while English has its importance as an international language, it does not follow from it that English should be the common language of India. More than a century has elapsed since Indians began to study English, but what is the percentage of the English knowing people to-day in India ? Rural India where ninety per cent. of the population lives has not yet fallen under the fascination of English. The study of an alien language is not only difficult and costly, but has also the baneful effect of denationalising the people. And lastly, the study of English has resulted in the decay of the many vernaculars of the country. The opponents of English forget that they are pouring

forth all their anger on the English language when they ought to direct it against the system of education which did not provide for the proper study of the vernacular. Instead of condemning the system, they condemn the language which has played the greatest part in the political and social evolution of India. The critics of English are generally those who have an inferiority complex to conquer. The attitude of the fox who went without the grapes is not much different from the attitude of those who condemn the English language.

The advocates of Hindi tell us that there is no conflict at all between Hindi and English or between Hindi and any other language, but the Muslim leaguers and the champions of Tamil in Madras tell us a different story. Muslims say that this partiality for Hindi means only one thing, the discouragement of Urdu. They read in this Hindi campaign an attempt on the part of the Congress to destroy the culture and civilization of the Muslims. As the Muslim League has agreed always to differ from the Congress we need not attach much importance to the Muslim opposition against Hindi becoming the common language. Some champions of Tamil in Madras have also found in this a sinister attempt on the part of the Brahmins to Aryanise the whole of India. They say

that this Hindi affair is a tactical move on the part of the unscrupulous Brahmins to maintain their ascendancy over others for all times. They are afraid the Brahmin will learn the language sooner than others and begin to exploit them as he did in the past with his knowledge of Sanskrit and English. The wonder is, those who know that the Brahmins are out to outface them do not adopt the necessary measures to ensure the first place for themselves. The opponents of Hindi are invariably the members of the Justice party which still seems to be ailing from chronic Brahminophobia. Now and then one hears that Hindi will ultimately displace Tamil, their mother tongue, as English has already done. These fears and charges are groundless and silly. In the new scheme of education, the first place is to be given to the mother tongue. From the lowest to the highest standard, the medium of instruction is to be the mother tongue and therefore, the boy or girl learns his or her mother tongue till the completion of his or her career in the school. Again, Hindi is to be taught only for a period of three years and that too, after the child receives a thorough grounding in its mother tongue. It is incomprehensible how under such an arrangement as this Hindi will give a set back to Tamil. The Justice

party is dead and yet the evil it did to public life in the province lives. Tamil in danger is a false cry which frightens no one, because every one knows that it is not in danger. The objections raised against Hindi have no sound reasons behind them. They are only the expressions of discontent of a party which is still writhing in its agony of defeat and disappointment. The claim of Hindi is unassailable and a degree of compulsion will alone stimulate its study. It promises to enable the Southerner and the Northerner to meet as brothers and exchange thoughts and confidence. It proposes to create a feeling of oneness among the people of the country. The Hindi campaign is a political move, but not more sinister in motive than the English campaign once was. One wonders what the champions of Tamil were doing all these years when English was supposed to weaken every vernacular in the country. Are these Tamil patriots more devoted to their language than the Malayalees are to Malayalam, the Andhras to Telugu, and the people of Karnataka to Kanarese ? There is only one explanation for this sudden outburst of linguistic patriotism among the handful of Tamilians who dread unforeseen dangers lurking beneath this Hindi "affair". The Justice party was born and nurtured in Tamil Nad

though it occasionally extended its arms to take in a stray Malayalee, or a discontented communal mediocrity in Andhra Desha. Malabar and Andhra never came fully under its baneful influence and therefore the two regions still maintain their spirit of nationalism. The anti-Hindi agitation in Madras is a purely political move on the part of the members of the Justice party. Its only effect is to enliven the political atmosphere of the province. It has caused a ripple, though only a ripple, in the calm waters of Congress politics and has challenged, though only feebly, the self complaisance of the Congress Government. Men and women do satiagraha before schools and find their way to jail. In the meanwhile, there is a rush of students in schools which have Hindi classes. Instead of making the government's move unpopular, this Hindi agitation has roused considerable enthusiasm among the boys and girls of the province for the study of Hindi. The youngsters find the language both easy and interesting. They study it with zest because it is no subject for examination. Their Hindi babble in the home causes not a little amusement to the elders. The Madras Premier has conquered the hearts of children. They adore him when they talk in Hindi.

The assumption of power by the Congress has been in a way an accession of strength to the masses. They have to-day found their voice. The half sympathetic, half-contemptuous phrase "the dumb millions of India" can no longer apply to them. They have grown conscious of their place in the country and of their rights in society. Though mainly illiterate and uneducated, they have begun to appreciate the advantages of organisation and common action. They no longer cringe and petition, they demand and demand effectively too. Kisan demonstrations and no-tax campaigns in rural parts, and strikes in factories in urban areas proclaim the awakening that has come over the common people. Neither the peasant, nor the industrial worker will hereafter allow himself to be conveniently exploited. The Congress has weaned them away from slavery ; it has taught them to stand on their own legs ; it has revealed to them their real strength. It is indeed one of the remarkable achievements to the credit of the Congress that it has been able to rouse up an apathetic, inert mass of humanity to a sense of its fundamental rights and inspire it with the hope of an escape from the tyranny of ages. But this mass awakening is at once a source of strength as well as of danger to the nation. The responsi-

lity for controlling this newly liberated mass energy, and guiding it through proper and peaceful channels rests with the Congress. Having kindled their hopes, any apparent reluctance or tardiness to satisfy their demands, the least relaxation of control over them will spell disaster to the country. The ethics of non-violence and truth have not yet permeated the masses, and at any time, under the slightest provocation they may try to get out of control. Any ambitious demagogue aiming at cheap political leadership and wishing to measure strength with the government may stir up discontent among them and involve the country in a revolution. The caution of the Congress governments will be interpreted as indifference or even as reluctance to meet their demands. It will be even insinuated that the taste of power has made the Congress forgetful of its promises. The promise of the millennium is easy, but to build up one, even if possible, is at best a matter of time. Even to-day, there are stray voices which complain that the Congress is no more the dynamic organisation it once was, that it has assimilated the qualities of the bureaucracy which is so vehemently denounced in the past. The Congress cannot ignore these voices nor can it silence them. They come from within its own ranks. It cannot remain over-

confident of its strength and position in the country. That which supports it to-day may itself be the cause of its fall to-morrow. The prestige and solidarity of the Congress as well as the peace and progress of the country depend on the manner in which the Congress governments fulfil promises once so liberally given, hopes once kindled in the arid hearts of the masses. The Congress cannot, like previous ministries, afford to tinker with a series of proposals for reform and bluff the people. The left wing is not only critical but also impatient and its influence on the masses is growing day by day. The caution and circumspection of the orthodox Congressmen, good in themselves, their eagerness to move along the line of least resistance, and their ill-concealed suspicion of progressive and heterodox elements within its own fold—these do not augur well for the future. The orthodox Congressman should develop a realistic outlook and try to accommodate himself to the views of his socialistic comrade. The Socialist may not be actively or personally responsible for the many demonstrations in the country, but his slogans and doctrines are. It is for the Congress Governments to understand this fact and draw the necessary moral. No nation can live on hopes alone.

The Congress governments have not yet succeeded in establishing industrial peace in the country. That the workers are dissatisfied with their plight is evident from the numerous strikes occurring in various places. They have latterly assumed the deadly proportions of an epidemic. The employer, in spite of his superior strength and resources cannot any longer ignore the legitimate demands of the workers. The age of exploitation is coming to a close, even in this country, the stronghold of capitalists. The consciousness that they contribute as much to the national prosperity as the capitalists themselves, if not more, is one of the acquisitions of the workers to-day. There is also among them the desire for unity and organisation. Collective bargaining has taken the place of individual petitioning. They have realised or are realising that the capitalist employer makes little difference between one employee and another, and that he respects their rights only so long as it furthers his interests to do so. The humanitarian motive is no more pressed into service by the capitalist employer, for he knows that the children of socialism have very little respect for charity. There is indeed a splendid awakening among the workers but they have not yet succeeded in winning their rights. The rise to power

of the Congress has indeed given them a hope and they expect that the national governments will find a solution for all their problems before long.

There broke out a series of lightning strikes since the Congress accepted office. In U. P., Madras and in Bombay strikes are still the order of the day. It is true to some extent that the workers do not abuse their right to strike, that they resort to this extreme step only when every other means of getting their grievances fail. Their grievances are also always not new. Public sympathy is invariably with them. The Congress governments are faced with a delicate problem. These strikes remind them of their liberal promises to safeguard the interests of workers. They cannot look upon this new phenomenon as dangerous and revolutionary and suppress it with force in the name of law and order ; nor can they refuse to interfere and leave the workers to take care of themselves alone. They owe their position, partly at least to the workers and therefore have a moral responsibility to improve their plight. It is indeed gratifying to find that the Congress ministries invariably succeeded in effecting compromises between the workers and the employers, compromises which in many instances placed the workers in a position of advantage. They have

shown that their sympathies are with the workers and this has not a little influenced the attitude of employers themselves towards the demands of labour. Congress has succeeded in creating the requisite atmosphere favourable for legislation ; it has succeeded to some extent in changing the outlook of employers who have now begun to realise that vested interests as such have no sacredness about them. This is an achievement worthy of the Congress but it means only that the preliminaries have been successfully completed. The real task has to be faced boldly and speedily if the situation is not to take an adverse turn.

Labour legislation is not so easy in India as some labour leaders would tell us. The provinces by themselves cannot take independent action. It is an all-India problem and can be solved only if all the provinces act in unison. If there is no uniformity, there is the danger of labour migrating from one place to another and industries in one centre thriving at the cost of industries in another. Even now, the policy of the Congress governments has alarmed the capitalists who threaten to shift the scene of their activities from British India to Indian States. Any industrial legislation in India, if it is to be successful, should be free from conditions which hamper the inflow

of capital. Indian capital is generally shy and will be doubly so if investment in industries is made uneconomic by means of legislation. The Congress governments have therefore to be cautious in their programme of labour relief. Any legislation undertaken on this behalf should be such as will bring capital and labour together in a spirit of mutual understanding. Minimum human needs, security of service, provision of alternative occupations during periods of inevitable unemployment, maintenance during periods of unavoidable incapacity to work, improvement of the factories' Act in several directions, an active policy to ensure industrial peace in the country, legislation aiming at the prevention of strikes and lock-outs as far as possible on the basis that any reduction in wage and change in conditions of employment to the disadvantage of the workers should take effect only after they had sufficient time to examine the merit of the proposed changes, exploring avenues of peaceful settlement through the channel of voluntary negotiation, conciliation, or arbitration, or by law, and lastly, educational facilities for working classes—this is the long and comprehensive programme which the Governments have to push through. Every provincial government is busy to-day with problems relating to

labour. Bombay has already put on the statute book the Trades Disputes Act, a piece of legislation which aims at ensuring industrial peace in the province. In Madras, the minister for labour has circulated a scheme among employers and employees which is to be the basis of legislation there. There is also a proposal to hold a conference of labour ministers of all the provinces in the near future to discuss all matters relating to industry and labour. It is likely they will arrive at definite conclusions and lay down a uniform policy regarding labour and industrial legislation. Unless something is done immediately, there is every likelihood of the strike fever spreading and causing considerable loss to industry. When one watches the present labour unrest in India, one begins to wonder whether it is a sign of health or strength. Who knows that the innocent, and illiterate labourer is not a pawn in the game of agitators who seek their inspiration from Russia ? The rapidity with which strikes are declared forces one to conclude that the aim of the instigators is not the welfare of labour but the undermining of the economic and social order. The danger is grave indeed.

The Congress under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi cannot be expected to have much enthu-

siasm for large scale industries and yet it cannot ignore the necessity for the industrial development of the country. Gandhiji's ideal if followed, will ultimately lead to the economic bondage of India. A return to the primitive conditions of society, however fascinating is neither practicable nor advisable. India is trying to establish her prominence among the nations of the world and she has to adopt all such measures to realise her mission as other civilised nations do. Even to-day, India is one of the rising industrial countries of the world and the tendency, despite the influence of Gandhism, seems to be for further industrial expansion. What exactly is the industrial policy of the Congress governments is not known, but from the manner in which the Congress High Command and the ministries approach the problem of industrialisation, one can infer that they intend giving a stimulus to the starting of large scale industries. The National Planning Commission which has already begun to function under the presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru owes its inception to Congress initiative and when this commission concludes its labours, we may be in a position to know what line the Congress governments will take.

The Minister for industries, Madras, who is an

ardent disciple of Gandhiji and admirer of Russia once remarked that the economic salvation of the masses depended on the starting of subsidiary industries which require no great investment of capital. Subsidiary industries, or cottage industries as they are called here, are essential for keeping the cultivators busy during periods of enforced idleness. But he also pointed out that he "was not one of those who do not believe in starting major industries". He was largely responsible for the formation of the National Planning Commission. He said in the course of one of his speeches : "I am a believer in planned economy. If Russia to-day is able to establish industries and build up collective farms and eradicate unemployment in the country, it is surprising why India should not be able to do so. While it is due mostly to external causes, such as foreign domination, and absence of control by the popular representatives over the whole fiscal policy of the country, something could be done even in the limited sphere of activities that we have at present. Economic planning which is very essential at the present day should have the following aims and objects : to introduce new methods of agriculture and extension of irrigation ; to increase production of various manufactured articles and agricul-

tural commodities, to increase the purchasing power of the people and consequently, their standard of living ; improving rural housing and sanitation, stimulating agricultural marketing, and encouraging co-operation and thus to make India self contained. For this purpose an all-India plan and programme will enable us to co-ordinate the activities of different provinces. The basis for the programme should be firstly, to exploit the land that is at present fallow and in the possession of the government, but which could be cultivated. If these are brought under cultivation, not only would the problem of food supply be solved but also to a large extent, the problem of unemployment. But mere exploitation of this land will not be of any value, unless middle class industries and cottage industries are started in these areas which will result in giving subsidiary occupation for the workers during the season when there is no cultivation."

"The only hope for the solution of the unemployment problem or for the development of the rural areas lies firstly, in the establishment of cottage industries throughout the length and breadth of the country. In order to put these ideas into effect, there must be real and effective central economic councils to tackle the complex problems

with the central government ; and provincial, district and even taluk and village economic councils in relation to the province, co-ordinating the activities of the central and local councils ; and on these councils there must be eminent economists, representatives of labour, agricultural and other interests. A more practical plan to adopt will be first to concentrate the social and economic experiments in several selected areas with considerable massing of men and materials such as are likely to create a revolution in the morale of the entire province and secondly to select regions and areas where conditions of economic life are particularly favourable and where effective rallies could be made. Economic planning could be successful, if economic councils of the right type representing all interests and with pure patriotic motives behind them to achieve the objects for which they were established were developed. With the coming of the Congress party into power, a hope has been aroused in the masses that some serious attempt will be made to develop industries. At this time it is essential for us to formulate a definite industrial programme and see it is carried out by placing it on a sound financial basis. I do not desire to hold out great hopes, because all this can be done only consistent with

the finances at the disposal of the provincial governments who are handicapped in many ways and as I have already pointed out have no control over the whole financial policy of the government of India. But I can assure you, on behalf of the government that we will exert our best to develop such schemes on the lines suggested with such modifications as may be found necessary when we tackle the problem in a practical manner."

It is true, finance is going to be a serious handicap to the Congress ministries. What with prohibition, liberal remission of land revenue and the limited scope for the expansion of resources, the provincial governments will in future find it extremely hard to push through all their favourite schemes. Those who accuse the Congress ministries of failure in fulfilling all their election pledges should realise the limitations under which they work. Vigorous efforts are anyhow made by them to find the wherewithal to finance their programme. They are devising new methods of taxation and are also effecting retrenchment wherever possible. Salary cut is not an easy affair as the Civil Services are directly under the Secretary of State. Voluntary sacrifice has not been much in evidence in spite of the fervent appeals and the stimulating example of ministers. The Prime

Minister of Madras exhorted the service in his own inimitable way to adopt simplicity as their ideal in life. While addressing a Muslim meeting, he made the following appeal : " There are many things the cost of which they could reduce. He was not appealing to a community which had no tradition of simplicity. Muslim history had a better record in this respect. He did not think the Caliphs lived the life of present day government officials. Sometimes, they sat on mats and transacted the world's business. They never had the advantage of a calling bell, electric communications and the like ". The result was not at all encouraging. The services did not make up their mind to do a noble thing before anybody could compel them to do it. " The difficulties came not from the civil services and he did not think any difficulty would come from that quarter. It would come from our own people. While even the sun dried bureaucrat of the service warmly sympathised with our aspirations, our own people paid very little heed to the philosophy of simplicity which the Congress servants exemplified in action." The new idealism left them alone. They were not so gullible as to be moved by mere appeals to sentiments. The non-gazetted Indian officers submitted a memorandum to the Premier

of Madras in which they stated clearly that they "would not agree to any voluntary, or compulsory cut, either temporarily or permanently, or in any shape or form." Sir Henry Gidney, the Anglo-Indian leader said that "to impose a cut in the salaries of government servants on the ground of liberating funds for the necessary reforms in the country is, in ordinary parlance, robbing Peter to pay Paul." Sir Henry was wrong. It was robbing Paul to pay Peter. The Premier did not give way. He said that "Indian servicemen should not compare themselves with Englishmen who are like gardens that we see sometimes upstairs in pots. They have to be carried upstairs bodily, brought to the sunshine, and again taken back. That gives them life. Certain services are of that kind. They are brought from a different place, nurtured here carefully, and occasionally they must be taken to the sunshine which means home. They must be allowed to go to the colder climate which alone can sustain them and they must be brought back because they are wanted. The law has made it necessary that we must have them. Rightly or wrongly, they are here and we cannot get behind that. When they are here, they are entitled to be watered as in the case of pot plantations. Therefore you cannot complain and

say 'treat me also like that.' Your snake gourd should be treated differently from the croton. Therefore, do not make comparisons and parallels. You cannot allow other people to say "why should the European Collector receive two thousand? I should also get the same." That is wrong. It is because of such claims and counter-claims of her quarrelsome children that Mother India had been reduced to a skeleton. Instead of making comparisons and advancing competing claims, they should look to the capacity of the mother. They should realise that hereafter service must carry less pay. It should no longer be thought that dignity consisted in leading a costly life. In fact, dignity ought to be in inverse proportion to the money they got from the labour of others. The less they extracted, from other people the nobler was their service." The case for lowering the scale of salaries could not be put more neatly and convincingly, than this, but all these persuasive appeals did not produce any change of heart. He could now do only one thing and that was to reduce the scale of salaries of future entrants and he did it. But the benefits of this wise step will only accrue in the years to come. Like many others of his kind, he too planted trees for others to pluck the fruits thereof.

No review of the achievements of the Congress ministries will be complete if it does not include a consideration of the manner in which they maintain law and order in the country. When the Congress accepted office, there indeed was a feeling that law and order would receive a new interpretation. People felt that there would no longer be "repression", that everyone would have perfect civil liberty. The release of political prisoners, the return of press securities forfeited during the previous regime and the lifting of the ban on associations in a way justified the expectations of the people. Every one thought that the long expected age of liberty had at last come. Unfortunately, in some quarters this liberal and generous gesture of the Congress governments was interpreted in a different way. Congressmen, especially the Socialists, believed that the removal of restraints imposed by the British government gave them perfect liberty to indulge in whatever they deemed proper. Scarcely had full civil liberty been restored in Madras when there occurred an incident which proved more than anything else how this generous gesture of the ministry was interpreted by one section of Congressmen. A certain socialist congressman of Bombay delivered a speech somewhere in Andhra

and the police managed to rope him in under the section relating to sedition. The prosecution and the subsequent trial caused considerable stir in political circles. Congressmen generally viewed this prosecution with disfavour and the Premier who is the minister for law and order was severely criticised for his "repressive" tendencies. The Premier kept quiet and allowed the critics to have their own way. At last, the courts including the High Court of Madras found the accused guilty. Now the Premier intervened and generously helped the socialist friend to return to Bombay without putting his term in the jail. The Premier's attitude towards this incident was indeed commendable. Even at the time of returning securities forfeited by certain newspapers, he had warned the owners and editors of newspapers in general against any tendency towards abusing the new freedom. His warning was then criticised and he was accused of developing the bureaucratic mentality. This incident of the socialist gave him an opportunity to make his followers understand that the Congress government would not interfere with the administration of justice and that law and order meant the same thing as it did in days past, and that Congressmen did not by virtue of their political views enjoy any special privileges

under the government of the day. Here was an open challenge to those who entertained the pious hope that under the Congress government they could do whatever they liked. Not only in Madras, but also in other provinces it was made plain that breaking of law, by whomsoever it might be, would not be tolerated. The Congress was for liberty but not for licence.

This sudden change of attitude on the part of the Congress governments towards agitators was resented by Socialists, and kisan leaders. They threatened the governments with satyagraha but could not make them relent. While the revolutionary section of the Congress is never weary of accusing the ministers of the tendency to imitate the British government, those who are for law and order admire their courage. When necessity arose, they had not the least compunction to use the same laws as the Britisher used during the days of civil disobedience. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, a drastic piece of legislation which saw the light of day during civil disobedience days is now found to be admirably suited to get rid of agitators against Hindi in Madras. There was criticism against using this Act to put down anti-Hindi agitation but the Premier only said that it would be repealed as soon as another was

passed by the assembly. When labour strikes and communal bitterness led to violence, the Congress governments did not hesitate to control the situation by taking suitable action. Firing against angry and violent mobs has not been rare in the Congress provinces. The Socialists and the Communists went on shouting against the ministries but the ministries never betrayed any weakness. Had it not been for the firmness with which law and order was maintained in the early days of Congress rule, the Socialists and the kisan leaders would have brought the country on the verge of revolution. Even the erstwhile critics of the Congress ministries have now begun to appreciate their courage, their impartiality and their determination to maintain respect for law. Many newspapers have recently been asked to furnish security in Bombay for the reason that they indulged in fomenting communal trouble or class hatred. The Britisher who once thought that Congress regime would usher in anarchy has now begun to feel that law and order can be maintained without prejudice to nationalism. The mere fact that not one single Governor had occasion to use his special powers for enforcing peace in the country is ample testimony to the strength and sense of responsibility of the Congress ministries. Under Congress

rule there is freedom, there is enough elbow room for every one to move about freely ; there is freedom of speech, and of association. In fact, India enjoys more freedom to-day than it ever did. If there is repression, it is only the repression of lawlessness, liberty degenerating into licence. The greatest triumph of the Congress has been and still is in the world of law and order. The Congress has shown that Indians can govern themselves, and this is no mean achievement.

VIII

CONGRESS AND COMMUNALISM

The Congress governments have more than justified themselves. They have achieved much ; they hope to achieve more. They have added to the prestige of the Congress and vindicated their claim to represent the nation. They have put down official snobbery ; they are rooting out corruption in the services. They have inaugurated the campaign of simplicity and sobriety. Everything has changed or is changing and the nation has grown alive to its own greatness. Indians have shed their inferiority complex and are ready to play their part in the evolution of a new world of freedom and peace.

One must be proud of the great things the Congress has done but one also wonders why it has not been able to do more. In one sphere at least, its achievements have been insignificant. It has not been able to wipe off the one lingering stain on Indian public life. In spite of its best efforts,

it failed to silence the voice of discord and to sound the chord of communal harmony. The fault is not of the Congress or of the ministries which work under it. For the last one century, the curse has been on the country and all attempts to lift it have invariably been futile. The Congress, true to its ideals, assures every Indian fundamental rights but communalists still shout and clamour for special rights and privileges. The rise into power of the Congress instead of allaying communal bitterness only aggravated it. Hindu-Muslim unity has become a tougher problem today than it ever was. Perhaps this communal problem will never be solved and India will have to progress in spite of it. The trend of affairs at the present day is not conducive to optimism. Pessimism seems to be pardonable and is the only justifiable mood under the circumstances.

Hinduism itself has its divisions and inequalities. Any third rate demagogue with an eye on political leadership need only mouth a few worn out platitudes on some communal platform to gain a reputation for virtues which he does not possess. Latterly, India has witnessed the coming into prominence of many a leader who under normal circumstances would lead none but himself. The discovery of the depressed classes and

of their real and manifold disabilities has enabled many to discover themselves. That the numerous castes and divisions in the Hindu community are a source of weakness has to be candidly acknowledged. What is surprising is that its weakness should be exploited by self styled leaders for selfish ends. These men do a positive disservice to the country in so far as they emphasise the defects and the differences without endeavouring to remove them. Perhaps it is not in their interests to remove them. Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan campaign has been a blow to many of these ambitious demagogues as their self-assumed leadership slipped away under their feet. The harijans began to realise that the caste Hindus generally were not opposed to their legitimate aspirations. The Congress under the inspiration of Gandhiji has been eminently successful in winning the confidence of these helpless people in an increasing measure despite the attempts of certain harijan leaders to mislead them. Proper representation in the ministries whenever possible, and liberal facilities for their material and moral well-being have been given them by the Congress governments. A perusal of the Congress budgets will convince any one of the truth of this statement. The Congress does not believe in lip sympathy ; it believes in

sincere and courageous action. "If I do not say anything in particular about the depressed classes, it is because we can help them by carrying out certain principles and not pampering them with false hopes as has been the practice in the past." These words of the Premier of the United Provinces reflect truly the Congress attitude towards the depressed classes. The principles are there ; and it is for the members of the classes concerned to watch and convince themselves of the fidelity with which they are carried out. Nothing has happened till now—Dr. Ambedkar apart—to disturb the confidence of the depressed classes and the various minorities in the good faith of the Congress ministries. An organisation which stands for nationalism cannot afford to abuse its power by tyrannising over minorities. Nor can it indulge in ugly communal bias and communal injustice which will ultimately undermine its solidarity. The increasing strength of the Congress has proved itself so fearful a menace to the existence of narrow, sectarian interests that in their death struggle they raise the cry that the majority is swallowing up the minorities. No one need take this cry seriously and no one in India is perturbed by it. Even the Governors who are specially empowered to safeguard the interests of the

minorities refuse to remember their special powers. The constitution which was originally framed to perpetuate the tyranny of the minority over the majority woefully failed to achieve its purpose. The sincerity of the Congress is so clear and unimpeachable that communal leaders find it hard to carry on their baneful propaganda against it. Latterly, they have taken to the methods of Hitler with the belief that even the worst of lies will develop into a truth if repeated publicly a certain number of times.

The depressed classes, the Indian Christians, and to some extent, the Anglo-Indians are not going to stand in the way of India's regeneration. They know that their own salvation depends on the salvation of India. They have found it more advantageous to become part of the majority organisation and share in its triumphs than stand apart beseeching protection at the hands of a third party. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the great Muslim community. Mr. Jinnah, the accredited leader of the Muslim League, has latterly assumed a hostile attitude towards the Congress. He is not prepared to acknowledge that the Congress is a national organisation—he who was once proud of calling himself one of its staunch members. He describes it

as a Hindu organisation aiming at the establishment of Hindu Raj in the country. He has no faith in democracy because democracy is government by the majority, and in India Hindus are the majority. The principles, ideals, and declarations of the Congress have no significance to him and consequently they cannot deceive him. Its resolutions are mere paper resolutions, good enough to hoodwink the innocent masses but so palpably insincere and absurd that politicians like him cannot swallow them. In the guise of nationalism, the Hindus are consolidating their position in the country to overwhelm every minority and establish their own raj. Mr. Jinnah began his campaign against the Congress only after the Congress accepted office. Perhaps he realised the strength of the Congress only then. Or, it may be, he was disappointed to find that there were not so many Muslim ministers in the Congress cabinets as he wished. In the selection of Muslim ministers, the Congress committed the unpardonable crime of not consulting the Muslim League President, the final authority on all matters relating to Muslims in the country ! The Congress was indeed willing and eager to have more Muslim ministers in its cabinets but there were not Muslims enough to satisfy its conditions. A

Muslim Leaguer in a Congress cabinet is an anomaly but Mr. Jinnah in his enthusiasm for his cause refused to recognise the difficulties of others. The inadequate representation of Muslims in the Congress cabinets was the immediate and ostensible excuse to start his militant campaign against the Congress. The campaign though intended solely to strengthen the Muslim cause and the Muslim League resulted in rousing communal animosity leading to communal riots.

Mr. Jinnah's plan of campaign was this. At first, he divided India into Muslim majority provinces and Muslim minority provinces. In the Muslim majority provinces everything was as it should be ; but in the Muslim minority provinces where unfortunately the Congress was in office, he discovered Muslims subjected to the most cruel tyranny, their claims ignored and their rights trampled underfoot. He wondered how the Governors could tolerate the tyranny of the majority over the minority ; how they could refrain from discharging their special responsibility on behalf of the minority communities, especially, the Muslim community. He lost all faith in the British government which professed one thing and performed another. He thought that the British government were sacrificing the Muslims to pla-

cate the powerful Congress, but he did not realise that

“The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are thus and thus,”

Anyhow, he made up his mind to counteract the growing strength of the Congress by rousing up his Muslim brethren. While he was getting ready for his campaign, the President of the National Congress inaugurated the Muslim mass contact movement. Also, here and there, Muslims began to see through the tactics of the League and leave it to join the Congress. This was too much for the President of the Muslim League to bear in patience. He recognised for the first time that the ideals of the Congress were acceptable to all Indians irrespective of their caste or religion while those of the Muslim League failed to satisfy the nationalist aspirations of the Muslims themselves. A sudden change of ideals was announced and the League was transformed overnight into an organisation for wrecking the federation scheme and winning independence for India. Mr. Jinnah felt that the League was now on a level with the Congress and that it should win an increasing measure of support from the Muslims. The results, however, of this sudden change of programme and ideals, and of his militant campaign

did not apparently satisfy him. The Muslim League mass contact movement was started and local branches of the league were formed in various parts of the country. In the Muslim majority provinces like Bengal and the Punjab a certain kind of violent propaganda was also set in motion. The League now ranged itself against the Congress and determined to fight the battle out to the bitter end. In what spirit the battle is fought to-day can be understood from the speeches which the Hon'ble Mr. Fazlul Huq makes now and then before an admiring audience in Bengal.

This is not the way for communal peace and harmony. The Muslim League is indeed the premier organisation of the Muslims but it seems that it largely derives its inspiration from religious and vested interests. Hindu-Muslim riots are now a common affair in many parts of India, especially, in the provinces of the north. The task of apportioning blame is not a pleasant one and will not help the cause which is dear to us all ; but we know that the Congress stands for nationalism and for equality of opportunities for all. No Congress ministry has as yet betrayed any inclination to swerve from the path of justice. Mr. Fazlul Huq made certain allegations against the Bihar ministry, that Muslims in the province:

were oppressed and that they were not shown the slightest sympathy by the government. Dr. Mah-mud, Minister of Bihar challenged Mr. Huq to substantiate his charges but Mr. Huq for reasons unknown kept discreetly silent. Again, the Pirpur Committee (a committee appointed by the Muslim League to prepare a record of Congress atrocities, injustice, cruelty and tyranny against the Muslims) came out with a report on the atrocities committed by the Congress ministries, but when the Congress ministries, one by one, met the charges levelled against them and proved them all baseless, there was complete silence. Vague charges of oppression of Muslims thrown out at random by the members of the League are helpful only in poisoning the public mind. The attitude of the League towards the Congress is not one which a great political organisation should have towards another. If communal harmony is to be achieved, the League should give up its militant, provocative attitude and also get rid of its aggressive communalism. It should fight as a political body with a definite political programme aiming at protecting and promoting the interests of Muslims and of the nation and not as a communal body steeped in religious fanaticism. It is idle to expect that the Hindu majority in India can be

coerced by a militant minority into accepting terms which will perpetuate communalism in the country. Democracy is government by the majority and the Hindus cannot help being in the majority in India. The duty of the minority is to convert the majority into its own way of thinking or to convert itself into a majority by argument and persuasion and not to intimidate the majority by mere bluff and bluster. If India is to be a democratic country, the Hindus will always be in the majority with power to control the destinies of the nation, but this does not mean that they will oppress the minorities. The history of Hindu India is refreshingly free from any story of oppression of or cruelty to helpless people. The tradition of the Hindus is not to oppress but to win by love and service, and this tradition will be maintained even in the years to come.

Sir Wazir Hassan once remarked that communalism was on its death bed. We wish he is right. He appealed to his brethren to develop a national outlook. "Mussalmans should have a greater share of service of the motherland. Two hundred years ago they were masters of India and are now sitting here as slaves saying 'communalism first, freedom afterwards'." The only solution for this Hindu-Muslim problem, if at all

there is one, lies not in pacts between leaders, but in the triumph of nationalism. There are many eminent Muslims within the Congress and in the Congress ministries. Theirs is the responsibility to give the lie to the vague charges levelled against the Congress and convince their brethren that they can achieve their rightful place in the Indian commonwealth more easily and surely by developing a national outlook than by following the dubious path of communalism. After all, the march is begun and the end is visible. Let not communalists repent later that they never formed part of the grand army of freedom and progress. The Muslim League, if it is not to go the way other political parties have gone, if its leaders are sincere in their professions, must cast off its communal garb and develop a truly national outlook. The Hindus, on their part, should not give the least room for suspicion about their good faith. The triumph of nationalism alone is the solution for the communal problem and Congress in power ought to interest itself more than what it does now with the spreading of the message of nationalism in every nook and corner of India. In this field, at least, the work of the Congress is only just begun.

IX

REACTION ON NON-CONGRESS PROVINCES

The electoral victory of the Congress extended only over six provinces, but its moral victory embraced the whole country. The limitation of its political power to a portion of India did not prevent it from exercising its moral influence over the whole of it. The ideal for which it stands, and the programme which it pursues being essentially and fundamentally national, it gained a moral ascendancy over the other provinces as well and imperceptibly began to shape their policies and programmes. The triumph of the Congress revolutionised public opinion in the country and compelled the non-Congress governments to adapt themselves to the spirit of the times. From the day the Congress assumed office, great things began to happen, things which announced the end of one regime and the beginning of another. In spite of their earlier start, the non-Congress

governments could not keep pace with the Congress government. They were in fact, feeling their way, those coalition governments with conflicting interests and clashing views. On July 30, 1937 the Manchester Guardian wrote under the caption "Congress gets to work" the following note : "Congress ministries have almost been completed in the six provinces where the party commands a majority and their formation has already had a considerable effect all over India. The more elaborate reforms, such as the revision of agricultural rents and revenue cannot be introduced at once and probably India will have to wait until the presentation of the budgets in September before the detailed proposals are known. But Congress has immediately carried out two notable actions In the first place, it has decided that no Congress minister in any province shall accept more than five hundred rupees (under section 40 of the Act) a month which is a quarter less than the sum which could be claimed. This is thoroughly in keeping with Indian ideals and will be more appreciated there than it would be here. In a party led by Gandhiji and Nehru the emphasis is bound to be on simplicity. The self-assured critics who insist that Orientals only use parliamentary government to

feather their own and their families' nests should consider the sacrifice and compare it with the methods of sound occidental democrats like Robert Walpole. The other action has been the release of a large number of political prisoners. It should not be possible for Englishmen to reconcile themselves to the practice of imprisonment without trial, by assuming that all those imprisoned are terrorists, nor to the identification of certain "political views" with sedition. There have been few aspects of British rule so unpopular among Indians and one of the best omens for the future is that the releases have not been opposed by any Governor. The effect of these first actions has been indeed considerable and the provinces which have non-Congress ministries are likely to feel them equally. Ministers in the Punjab, and Bengal who have sometimes a salary of as much as Rs. 3000/- a month may find their position awkward and Mr. Fazlul Huq, the premier of Bengal will be subject to increasing pressure to go ahead with a more radical programme particularly with regard to the release of political prisoners."

Another factor which helped to render the position of non-Congress ministries delicate and difficult was the presence of the Congress as their

opposition in their legislatures. Even in the non-Congress provinces, the Congress is the largest homogeneous party with a voting strength greater than that of any other single group in the Assembly. These ministries do not command a stable majority. They owe their position to the coalition of various parties and consequently have an unenviable time. If they wish to keep themselves in office, they have to listen to and satisfy the conflicting demands of their patrons, who will otherwise threaten them with a dissolution of the coalition at any time. Therefore, there is very little scope for them for constructive work. Their difficulties do not end here. They have to face a strong opposition in the legislature, an opposition which has the support of the country's public opinion and which is gradually converting members of other petty parties to its own way of thinking. Condemned by public opinion, and forsaken by their supporters, these coalition ministries will before long give way to those commanding a stable, reliable and unified majority in the legislature.

The inherent weakness of the non-Congress ministries was demonstrated as early as September, 1937 by the sudden termination of the Abdul Quaiyum ministry in the North West Frontier

Province. Dr. Khan Sahib, the leader of the opposition succeeded in getting a no-confidence motion against the ministry passed through in the assembly. Sir Abdul Quaiyum's ministry was not in fact so reactionary as that of Mr. Huq's in Bengal but it had one grave disqualification in that it was not a Congress ministry. Dr. Khan Sahib moved the no-confidence motion in the Assembly in the following words : " This Assembly expresses want of confidence in the council of ministers consisting of Sir Abdul Quaiyum, Khan Bahadur Saadulla Khan, and Rai Bahadur Meher Chand Khana collectively. The onerous duty of moving the resolution is made easier by mutual understanding so that I do not wish to take the time of the House to detail the deeds of the ministry It is my earnest request that those who are on the treasury benches will take part in the constitutional advancement of the country and work for freedom from foreign domination. I know coercion has been practised by some officials to whom I do not intend to refer. The ministry was quite new to the principles of democracy and was not aware of the exact application of power. I am sure they will realise now that it will be idle thought to make oneself responsible to anybody else but the electorate which

sent them here. Democratic institutions were not the only things that mattered ; it was the way to handle the spirit of democracy that mattered. We have to provoke unity of age, and solidarity of sentiments which help individuals to think of the common good of the motherland."

The new ministry which came into power was not a coalition ministry, for those who were responsible for the fall of the Quaiyum ministry undertook to abide by the Congress rules and discipline. " Finding ourselves in agreement with the policy and programme of the Congress work in the legislature and considering the situation in this province, we hereby agree to give our full co-operation to the Congress Party in the Frontier Assembly in furtherance of that programme, to participate in deliberations of that party, to be bound by its decisions regarding its constitutional activities in the legislature and to be subject to control and discipline of the party in equal measure with other members of it." Pandit Jawharlal Nehru in welcoming this new Congress Ministry observed thus : " It is true the declaration made by the new members of the Congress party is somewhat different from the regular Congress pledge. Nevertheless, the declaration is comprehensive enough so far as work in the legislature

is concerned, and both the policy and discipline of the Congress are accepted. Thus it is entirely incorrect to say that a coalition ministry has been formed in the North West Frontier Province." What happened on the frontier was nothing but a kind of political conversion. This was yet another triumph for the Congress and its ideology.

The Congress High Command is opposed to coalition ministries and with reason too. First of all, it will lead to relaxation of Congress discipline and the lowering of the Congress ideals. Compromises are essential and inevitable in a coalition ministry and they may occasionally necessitate a political party to go against its own avowed principles. The Congress will co-operate with other parties without surrendering its individuality and will welcome the co-operation of other parties with it, if those parties are willing to accept the Congress ideals and programme. Perhaps it will be asked why the Congress insists on other parties merging in it, while it is not prepared to do likewise. The answer is simple. Not one of these various political parties has such a comprehensive national programme as the Congress has. While the Congress programme and policy are applicable to the whole nation, theirs are applicable to certain special areas and certain sections of the

population. If the Congress goes out of its way and enters into a coalition, it will render itself ridiculous. If it should accept office in a province, it must have a stable majority bound to observe its discipline and programme without qualification and reservation. There are weighty reasons justifying this caution. "An opposition which has strength of numbers and of influence can legitimately complain of the severest form of repression if it be kept back from office by a mere technicality", remarked one who could not appreciate the caution of the High Command. It is not mere technicality that prevents the High Command from lifting the ban on coalition. Congress accepts office, not for the sake of office but for pushing through its programme which in essence is revolutionary. Unless it can command never-failing support, it has no justification to assume responsibility for government. Compromise is not for the Congress at the present time. Coalitions in India are not a dependable affair to-day. So long as the Congress finds that it cannot convert itself from a minority into a majority, it should remain satisfied with being in the opposition. A strong and sincere opposition can do more service to the country than a ministry which depends for its existence on the support of a number of parties

which have very little in common. What happened in Sind perfectly justifies this view. The strength of the Congress party in the Sind legislature is only six, but the party has been able to inspire members of other parties with their own enthusiasm and thus get rid of the Hidayatulla ministry. The present Sind ministry is all but in name a Congress ministry. There is a move to transform the ministry into a full-fledged Congress ministry and it is likely to succeed. The Premier and his colleagues are willing to accept the Congress programme and abide by the Congress discipline. The influence of the Congress made itself felt in Assam also recently. As in the Frontier, the Congress party in Assam managed to win the sympathies of certain individuals belonging to other parties and with their help to overthrow the Saadullah ministry. To-day, the Assam ministry is a Congress ministry though its stability cannot be said to be dependable. The Europeans and vested interests are keenly opposed to the present ministry and at any time it may be driven out of office. Bengal stands by itself and there does not seem to be any immediate prospect of the Huq ministry giving place to a Congress ministry. The Bengal Assembly Congress party reflects the confusion and want of cohesion charac-

teristic of its provincial committee and therefore it cannot materially alter the political line up in the house. Mr. Fazlul Huq holds his position not by implementing election pledges, but, by transforming himself into a champion of Muslim rights and Muslim religion. Anyhow, he has at present nothing to fear from the Congress which by its endless party bickerings and complete violation of discipline has become disorganised and weak. In Punjab, the Congress party is essentially weak and cannot make its voice heard. The Local Congress organisation also suffers from the same defects as those of the Bengal Congress. While the influence of the Congress party and the provincial committee on the ministry is not what it should be, the ministry has some good record of work to show. The premier and his colleague the Hon'ble Sir Choturam have done some real service to the poor millions of the Punjab. The Unionist party, though it does not follow the official Congress programme has much in common with the Congress. No province can escape the influence of the Congress which wields power over the major portion of the country. The standard by which an administration is judged to-day is the one adopted by the Congress ministries. Even non-Congress ministries cannot

escape being judged by this standard. Consequently, we find in all provinces an earnest desire to adopt the congress programme, though in an unofficial manner. There is no exaggeration in saying that the Congress has conquered the whole of India. Where the Congress does not govern, the Congress ideology governs.

Bengal requires special notice because of her peculiar problems. It is Bengal that made the loudest noise under provincial autonomy. The Congress provinces had their crises but they evoked only a passing interest. Bengal began with a crisis which still continues. It was in Bengal two opposing ideals met in conflict. "The dark shadow of the old regime, the old habits covering acts of injustice and oppression, of flouting public opinion with the pretence of maintaining law and order, still dominate the presidency of Bengal. Hundreds of sons and daughters of our motherland may starve themselves to death, thousands of them may arbitrarily be deprived of their freedom ; thousands and thousands of our labourers may roam about in our villages naked and hungry. All these may be compelled to live on the verge of starvation, but no relief and no sympathy can be extended to them because of the chimerical fear of breach of rules of discipline and law and order.

Legitimate and non-violent demonstrations by the peoples against the activities of the government are suppressed with force and are construed as threats founded on communal bias." The Bengal ministry from the very beginning failed to read the spirit of the times. They thought they could go on at the same slovenly pace as before and continue to do things in a spirit of paternal condescension. They refused to see the tremendous upheaval all around them or seeing it paid little heed to it. To add to this, there was a certain distrust of the Congress which coloured their vision and their policy, if they had one. To follow a liberal policy, and to pursue a liberal programme would be to do as the Congress did. Being members of a party which looked down on the Congress, they could not knowingly commit the crime of imitation. The Congress as an irresponsible body was indulging in mere spectacular heroics which would ultimately lead the country to perdition ; but as responsible statesmen, the Bengal ministers could not stoop to them. There was yet another factor which influenced the Bengal ministry in following its no-change policy. What was food for one party was poison for another. Action meant defeat ; inaction ensured continuance in office and power. No wonder,

they clung to the path of safety and self-interest. When the whole of India was throbbing with a new life, with a new freedom and a new hope, Bengal was forced to be satisfied with repression, sorrow and humiliation.

The Bengal ministry could not enjoy for long this self-complacent mood. The challenge came, not from Bengal alone, but from all India. There was universal protest against the ministry's callous disregard of public opinion. The Andamans' prisoners had resorted to a mass hunger strike but the government of Bengal was said to have kept the fact secret. The freedom which political prisoners in other parts of India won on the rise of the Congress into power was denied to the thousands of Bengali youths shut up in Andamans and elsewhere. Hunger strike was the only way in which they could express their grievance. The Congress President issued a stirring appeal to the Government of India and to the Bengal Government : "To-day, this inhuman tragic sight is uppermost in the people's minds and the shadow of death hovers over them. While we argue, people might well be dying. I trust still, that this human side will be considered by the Viceroy. No government ever lost prestige by doing the right thing. But even if prestige be the balance,

there are other factors in life that count for more ". A wave of indignation swept the country. The Bengal ministry valiantly stood its ground, protecting itself with the shibboleth of law and order.

If the Bengal ministry originally thought that all this agitation for the release of political prisoners was but a put up affair of the Congress to discredit it, it was now disillusioned. All self-respecting Indians wondered at the attitude of the ministry. Thousands of human lives were at stake. The Congress President and Mahatma Gandhi interfered and appealed to the prisoners to give up hunger-strike and also assured them that some way would be found out for winning their freedom. Gandhiji took upon himself the arduous task of negotiating with the ministry and convincing it that the misguided youths who numbered their days in the cell had given up faith in terrorism and that public peace would not in the least be endangered by their release. Public opinion, the justness of the cause, and the disarming sincerity and impartiality of Gandhiji, all together rendered it possible for the Bengal Government to arrive at a decision which everyone had been anxiously waiting for. A thousand detainees and more were released immediately after the nego-

tations were concluded and Gandhiji undertook to find a way out for enabling those who were still in jails to gain their freedom. This wholesale release of prisoners was completely justified by their subsequent conduct. Not one of them gave the government the least cause to regret their generous gesture. If the Home Minister's original attitude towards this momentous question betrayed a certain callousness, his later sincerity and magnanimity more than made amends for it. He must indeed be proud of an achievement which has won him the heartfelt blessings of many a home and which will enshrine him in the hearts of the youths of Bengal for ever. When the magnitude of the problem that confronted the Bengal ministry is realised, one will be able to appreciate its fear and hesitation. At present, there are very few prisoners and even they will be released shortly. The Congress put heart into the ministry ; Gandhiji showed the ministry the way. While this release of detenues and political prisoners will ever remain one of the magnificent achievements of the Bengal Ministry, we cannot also overlook the fact that it is at the same time a splendid triumph for the Congress.

All the non-Congress provinces are following more or less the policy of the Congress in regard

to the release of political prisoners and restoration of civil liberty to the people. The little "repression" that still lingers in some of the provinces only betrays the weakness of the governments concerned and their lack of confidence in themselves. Time would certainly help them to get rid of this weakness. The removal of the restraints on the fundamental rights of the people did not undermine public peace anywhere. There are indeed communal riots, but they are not a new phenomenon in India. While law and order are enforced with the same firmness as in days past, they are enforced by men who know the country and its people. Except in Bengal, sedition does not crop up anywhere. The ideals, policy and programme of the Congress are permeating the non-Congress governments and they are developing a more and more liberal outlook as days go by. Congress is in power only in eight provinces but it has truly conquered the whole of India. The famous ministerial crisis in U. P. and Bihar and the manner in which it was got over not only enhanced the prestige of the Congress but also revealed the possibilities of provincial autonomy if worked by men of boldness and vision. Today, the Congress is setting up the high ideal of service and sacrifice and those governments which

do not strive to follow this ideal, which for the sake of personal and communal interests ignore the welfare of the nation stand on perilous ground, and will at any time be overwhelmed by public opinion. It ought to be remembered that communalism is a disease which is seen only in the higher altitudes of society and that the millions living in rural India are as yet free from it. It is time reactionaries realise that ideas know no barriers and that the Congress will not stop half way in its career of conquest.

X

CONGRESS AND FEDERATION

“The nature of the constitution is still a plank on the platform of the Congress and the very parliaments which are functioning under the constitution—at any rate in those provinces in which the Congress has a majority in the legislature—have been passing resolutions, in spite of the fact that they are functioning successfully under the constitution, declaring it wholly unacceptable to them. Indeed the strange idea seems to be prevalent that in framing the constitution, we have been actuated by some sinister motive.” Lord Zetland is surprised at the attitude of the Congress towards the new constitution but if he remembers what his predecessor in office said about the same constitution, he would not accuse the Congress of entertaining any “strange idea” about it at all. Sir Samuel Hoare in a letter to his constituents in Chelsea observed : “We have no intention of abdicating our responsibilities. We shall certainly not repeat the Irish

precedent. While we are prepared to support the cause of Indian self-government, we are certainly not going to sacrifice British and imperial interests. The army will remain under the control of Parliament; the services, recruited by the Secretary of State will continue under the guarantee that they now possess of parliamentary protection. The Governor-General is to exercise all important duties including the duty of ensuring the peace and tranquillity of the country, its financial stability, and the fair treatment of the services and British trade. In these all-important fields, he will have not only the right, but the duty to intervene if the government is by legislature or administration transgressing any one of them. Similarly, in the provinces, duties corresponding with their responsibilities will be placed on the provincial governors." Sir Samuel Hoare made good his promise to his constituents and the India Act emerged out of Parliament. Is there any wonder, then, if Indians entertain the strange idea that there are "sinister motives" behind the constitution? Provincial autonomy functions successfully not because of its inherent virtues alone, but also because of the eagerness of those working it to make it yield the maximum results.

Immediately after accepting office, every Con-

gress legislature passed a resolution on the Congress demand. Here is a specimen. "This Assembly resolves that the local government do forward to the government of India and to His Majesty's government its emphatic opinion that the Government of India Act, 1935, should be replaced at the earliest possible date by a constitution in consonance with the aspirations of the people of India as expressed in the resolution of the Indian National Congress and that the assumption of office by ministers in this presidency should by no means be understood as a surrender of the national demand for a constitution to be shaped by the representatives of the people of India duly summoned to a constituent assembly convened for the purpose." In moving it in the Assembly, the Hon'ble Mr. C. Rajagopalachariar, the Premier of Madras made the following observations : "It is a very strange thing for the head of government functioning under the new Government of India Act for the time being to have to attack the constitution under which he stands and speaks. But the peculiar situation of India is such that many such things may happen and must happen. I express not only my opinion or the opinion of the members of the ministerialist party in the House, but the opinion of the vast body of people all over India

belonging to various parties and holding various shades of political opinion, when I say that the Government of India Act of 1935 is based on a negation of the national self respect of India, on a negation of the principle of democracy. I do not belittle the scope and opportunities available to a provincial government formed under the Act; if I thought so little of it, I should not be standing here speaking to the House on this occasion. It is true, there is much scope, much work, much responsibility, but that does not mean much freedom or much independence. It is a very big cage, this provincial autonomy, but it is a cage all the same. It is no consolation to say or to be told that the cage is a very large one. Men and women whom I represent are familiar with prison life. So it occurs to me that I may explain my point with reference to things that happen inside prisons. Sometimes prisoners are kept in small cells. Sometimes the cell door is left unlocked. If the men shut their eyes, they may imagine they are not locked within a prison at all, but if they looked about they would see that the yard was locked and guarded also. The provincial autonomy that we have is very much of that kind and that is the reason why, though at the head of the provincial government with a large scope, with large responsi-

lities and with plenty of opportunities to do good to the people, I still move this resolution that the constitution is bad and must be replaced."

Some members of the opposition appealed to the Premier to try the federation experiment also. His reply was characteristically stinging. "Just because I agree to try the provincial autonomy, it is not right that I should be asked to try another dangerous experiment. Acceptance of office in the provinces did not in the least imply the sea worthiness of the federation scheme. I and my party are as convinced as ever that the federal structure is absolutely ridiculous. Do not please end the constitution, but please begin it, says a member. It is a beautiful antithesis, but I would ask him in turn why should I agree for the first time that Indian princes who refuse to give representative institutions or responsible government to their own people in their own states should be allowed to make experiments in ruling us over such important matters as have been reserved for the Centre in addition to the defence of the empire ?. If I have the courage to take certain risks, it does not mean that I should take risks of a wholly different kind, more dangerous and of a larger magnitude. All-India unity is no doubt a good thing. An all-India central authority is also good. If I can get

in the federal structure anything like a majority which I have in this House, I would like the circus trainer beard the tiger."

The new constitution is not acceptable to Indians but it is doubtful whether a constituent assembly capable of evolving a constitution is a feasible proposition to-day. First of all, political consciousness has only just begun to permeate the masses; secondly, there are various conflicting interests to be adjusted and composed; and finally, communalism continues to threaten the essential unity of the country. Even Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru does not seem to believe that the constituent assembly ideal is within our reach to-day. The sponsors of the proposition are conscious of its impracticability at this moment. Their aim in pressing this resolution in the legislature is only to declare their resentment against the constitution which has been thrust upon them and to suggest the ultimate political goal of India.

The Congress was, from the very beginning the most vehement critic of the new constitution and yet it agreed to work provincial autonomy. According to the Congress, it is not working the constitution but wrecking it from within. The resolution on the Congress demand is only one of the many ways of

achieving the end in view. That provincial autonomy, in spite of its being a cage offers a certain volume of responsibility and freedom to the ministers is admitted by the Congress ministers themselves. That the so-called special and reserved powers of the governors are not after all so threatening has also been proved. That even in Bengal, the ministers are directly responsible for law and order has been convincingly shown by the gradual release of political prisoners. The storm has blown over. Deadlocks occurred, but they too were got over. Healthy conventions are springing up which render the constitution elastic and liberal. What Lord Zetland said just before the formation of Congress ministries has been amply substantiated by experience. He said : ".... Let it not be supposed that the field of government is to be divided into two parts in which the governor and the ministry operate separately at the risk of clashes between them. The essence of the new constitution is that the initiative and responsibility for the whole of the government of the province, though in form vesting in the governor, passes to the ministry as soon as it takes office." The governors to-day are not at all meddling potentates eager to pull the ministers down. They are essentially constitutional heads

of the government, ready to support, advice, and guide the ministers responsible to the people.

Provincial autonomy on paper frightened many and the Congress the most, but provincial autonomy in practice has shown that it is anything but a monster. Once the Congress touched it with disdain, but now it has begun to tolerate it. Wrecking is still the cry in the air but it has become a synonym for working. It is indeed one of the pleasantest ironies of politics that the most vehement critics of the constitution should themselves be its best defenders in action. No one in India will commit the folly of saying that provincial autonomy has not succeeded and no one in England will venture to doubt the political acumen and the sense of responsibility and administrative ability of Indians. Provincial autonomy has discovered many brilliant personalities. The provincial ministers, a few of them at least will leave a name behind them which posterity will not willingly let die. A constitution which has made this possible deserves something more than mere condemnation. The paper constitution is there but it is scarcely ever referred to. The much dreaded governors have not emerged out of that precious document and no one believes they ever will. Congress says that it is the government and no one

says that it is not. One wonders whether Lord Zetland was not right when he said that we were all labouring under an illusion once ; whether Sir Samuel Hoare's letter to his constituents was anything more than an attempt to administer solace to them. It is always the Englishman who knows our wants and our weaknesses.

The illusion has vanished. Provincial autonomy is no longer an ugly monster which scares people away. But what do we know of this federation ? It may be a real monster and the way in which some Congressmen describe it is enough to frighten even the bravest among us. But the other alternative is also possible. We may still be under Lord Zetland's illusion or maya. We look at the paper and imagine many things. Our description of the monster does credit to our fertile imagination. We shout, flourish our weapons and threaten it with destruction. No one doubts our earnestness and courage, but there are some who smile. Theirs is a knowing, significant smile. Will ours be but a fight against the windmill ? Are we sure the trick will not be played on us a second time by the self same maya ? As we are men of courage and fully armed, we can boldly approach the monster. If it is really a monster, we shall try to tame it, and if it is not tameable,

we know how to kill it. We are past masters in the art of wrecking. As men who have fought a thousand battles, it is unbecoming of us to be frightened by monsters at a distance. Let us come to grips with it and force it to yield. Provincial autonomy has yielded ; there is nothing to show that federation will not.

Like the farmer in the story, the typical Congressman has no ear for fine talk, especially when it relates to federation. Instead of trying to make weeds grow into cabbage, he would dig them up and destroy them. There are certain things which deserve only destruction and federation is one of them. With the Congressman wrecking is an article of faith. "Congress members and Congressmen in general want to break the front of the federation, the back of the federation, and the left and the right of the federation and throw it at the face of those who framed it, because the federation means the handing over the destinies of India to the British capitalists and vested interests." Pandit Nehru is not in the habit of mincing matters at any time, but never was he so vehement and uncompromising in his opposition as now and against this federation. Non-Congressmen and even the Viceroy are prepared to admit that the federal scheme has a number of anoma-

lies. Lord Linlithgow said : " I am well aware that the schme of federation laid down in the Constitution Act gives rise in some quarters to doubts and criticism. I have done my best to make myself familiar with the nature of that criticism and I think I can say with complete truth that every one of the grounds upon which it is levelled was before my colleagues and myself upon the Committee of Parliament at the time we made our recommendations. We saw the difficulties of setting up a federation composed of disparate units and we were fully seized of the implications that must follow an arrangement of that kind. But two considerations in their view outweighed all others. One was the maintenance of the unity of India and the other, the necessity for a central government capable of formulating economic policies affecting the interests of the sub continent as a whole." While His Excellency was prepared to admit the existence of anomalies, in his view " the anomalies are the inescapable incidents not merely of the introduction of an all-India federation at this moment, but of its introduction at any time within the measurable future." The Congress is not opposed to the principle of federation; it is only opposed to the contemplated federation scheme which bristles with so many anomalies. It

refuses to believe that "they are the inescapable incidents of federation" at this moment or at any time in the future and wants to get rid of them now and once for all.

Those who are working provincial autonomy do not, anyhow, seem to have any serious objection to the federation of the British Indian provinces alone. Many leading Congressmen like Mr. Satiamurthy have often plainly expressed their approval of a federation of this kind. The governor-general's discretionary and special powers do not evidently frighten them, because, they know or feel that he would rest content with being in the back ground as the governors do now. Provincial autonomy must also have taught them how to avoid situations which bring into play the reserved powers of the governor-general. The Congress seems to have developed confidence in the political integrity of the Englishman, but it is still doubtful of the part which their own people, the princes, will play in the federation scheme. The autocratic princes with their reactionary views are not the kind of company which enthusiastic democrats and budding socialists will find agreeable. The British Indians, especially Congressmen, fear that the States will be a millstone round the neck of British India retarding its march towards democracy and

freedom. As it stands, the Princes will become members of the federation without surrendering any of their so-called rights and privileges. Themselves free from the impact of democracy, they are in a position to exercise a control, and an effective control too, over the democratic tendencies of the British Indian provinces. By entering the federation the princes stand to gain much more than what they would if they kept themselves back, and that at the cost of British India. The provinces have every reason to suspect the motive behind this arrangement. They fear that the federation scheme has been evolved not for the good of India, but for protecting British and imperial interests and that the princes are a pawn in the game. The resolutions which the Congress passed on the subject of federation all emphasised the inadvisability of bringing together two entirely different kinds of political units under a constitution which gives little scope for the development of democracy. Those who have been watching the attitude of the Congress towards this important question will be able to detect a recognisable change in it. Its hostility to-day is not so much directed against that part of the scheme which fortifies British and imperial interests as against the other which proposes to make sunshine out of cucumber.

There was a time when it was thought that it would be possible to wreck the whole constitution by refusing to form ministries in the provinces. When the provincial part of the constitution was suspended, there would not be any possibility of the federation coming into existence. This was one of the many reasons urged against the acceptance of office by the Congress. Fortunately for us all, the Working Committee alive to the realities of the situation refused to be beguiled by such alluring propositions. It knew the trend of public opinion in the country, and did not wish to go against it. Also it was not possible then to visualise the consequences suspension of the constitution over the major part of India would lead to. Who could say then with certainty that the constitution would be suspended at all? It would have been a leap into the dark had the Congress listened to the advice of mere wreckers. It would have been a political blunder of the first magnitude if the Congress had not fulfilled the popular wish to see it in office. While the results of a refusal to shoulder responsibility were unknown, the possibilities of shouldering it were definitely known and known to be immense too. The successful working of provincial autonomy would enable the Congress to convince the British people of the reason-

ableness of the Indian demand for full responsible government. That would also furnish the Congress with an opportunity to prove that Indians could be as efficient in administration as the Britishers themselves. Thirdly, that would afford the Congress facility to pursue its constructive programme and thus win the confidence and support of the masses in all its future political activities. That the Working Committee was not wrong in its anticipations has been proved by the high reputation of the Congress here and in England. Lord Lothian who visited India and watched the working of provincial autonomy was very much impressed with the great activity and substantial achievements of the Congress governments. Even die-hards in England have begun to appreciate the good work of the Congress which in their view is the only organised and representative political party in the country.

What then is the fate of federation ? Will it take shape at any time in the near future ? The chances are, it will. The Princes have realised the advantages of entering the federation. They do not now insist so much upon their rights and privileges as they used to do in days past. They have begun to feel that it would be a folly to stand

in the way of the unification of India. To some extent, they have got rid of their fear and suspicion of the Congress also. The only opposition worth the name to federation is that of the Congress, but there are ways of eliminating even this. The Paramount Power should advise the princes to adopt a liberal policy in their states and to introduce some form of representative government in them. The Indian States are backward because the Paramount Power did not properly exercise its powers of supervision and control in the past. "The British government made no effort to alter the constitution of the States or to enforce the adoption of principles such as the separation of state and personal revenue, the independence of the judiciary, the organisation of the civil service on an effective basis, free from corruption, the maintenance of the rights of the subjects to liberty and property and so forth. Gross inhumanity would not be tolerated; very poor government was acquiesced in freely enough." These words of Sir A. B. Keith are literally true. There are princes who have realised the futility of swimming against the current, but there are also princes who think that they can ignore the spirit of the times. Many of the States are not progressive enough and even the most elementary type of representative gov-

ernment is not possible in them. This has to change. Instead of leaving reform of administration to the initiative of individual rulers, the Paramount Power should prepare a scheme and enforce it in all states so that all of them will have the minimum of good government. What the Congress wants is that the representatives of the States in the federal legislature should have a certain amount of freedom. While the members from the States should not be mere mouthpieces of their Darbars, they cannot be expected to develop the same political consciousness as the British Indian members. We must remember that John Brown could not make negroes fight for their freedom even though he armed every one of them with a pike. As the States surrender very little of their sovereignty, questions affecting them will be few and far between in the federal legislature and therefore it is possible to give the States' representatives full freedom to identify themselves with any of the various political parties in the House when all-India questions are under discussion. This is indeed a condition which the princes will not easily accept under the present circumstances. Anyhow, if the Congress gives up its hostile attitude towards the Princes, some kind of happy compromise is not impossible. There are

many difficulties which cannot be foreseen but which can be solved if the Princes, the governor-general and the Congress develop the spirit of mutual accommodation and understanding. If each party stands on its own rights, Indian unity will ever remain a mere dream.

What the ultimate attitude of the Congress towards federation will be, one can only guess now. Anyhow, there is no room for pessimism. The personality of Gandhiji looms large in the public life of the country and many honestly feel that he will, in his own inimitable way, clear the ground for the Congress. Mahatmaji was to a degree responsible for the Congress giving in to provincial autonomy; he has been the never failing Mentor of the Congress ministries during the last twenty seven months. Who knows he will not play an equally important part in influencing the Congress to work federation? Who knows that he will not succeed in influencing the British government to round off the angularities of the Act? No substantial change in the Act itself need be expected now and that for two reasons. One is, Britain is chary of prestige in matters Indian and the other is, the European situation is giving her a good deal of anxiety just now. The Act may remain the same but it is possible to give it a libe-

ral interpretation. Gandhiji will extort from the British government a gentleman's agreement and thus make it possible for the Congress to complete its triumph. Under the present state of affairs in Europe, Britain cannot afford to treat India with scant courtesy. Lord Linlithgow had had talks with Gandhiji and leading Congress members of the legislature and he must be knowing well the Congress point of view. There is every reason to hope that the atmosphere of distrust will clear away. A gentleman's agreement between the Congress and the British government is easier today than it was in 1937. Lord Linlithgow who knows what the Congress is and what influence it wields in the country can be expected to make an agreement of the kind possible. In his attempt to complete the constitutional edifice, let him look to Gandhiji for guidance and help Gandhiji who embodies in himself all the aspirations of renaissance India.

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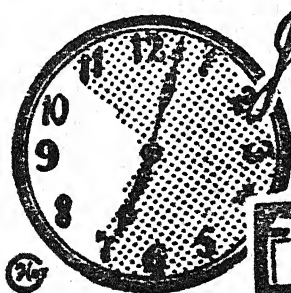
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XI

AT THE CROSS-ROADS AGAIN

On August 25, 1939, India was pre-occupied with problems of federation. The Viceroy was moving heaven and earth to complete the constitutional edifice which was so dear to him. The Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes had more than one interview with His Excellency, and it seemed that the Princes were beginning to realise that their fears were after all liars. Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League were not a little perturbed by the prospect of the completion of the federal structure and they came out with the declaration that democracy was not suited to India. Fortunately for them, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan went to their rescue with his novel Constitution. The constitutional prodigy saw the light of day but very few noticed it. The Hindu Mahasabha continued its tirade against the Congress for its non-Hindu outlook, and the Congress High Command reiterated its national policy. The Socialists

and extremists within the Congress fold looked with alarm on what they regarded as the High Command's complacent mood. Mr Subash Chandra Bose organised his Forward Bloc and began an organised campaign against the High Command. The voice of discord sounded shriller than ever, and yet people felt that federation would come to stay and that India would be a united nation.

Even now war clouds were gathering in Europe. Hitler was making it impossible for nations to live in peace. Poland was to be his victim but that brave country found in England and France a friend. Hitler threw his challenge and it was taken up with courage by the Poles. On August 31, when the sun went down, the gathering war clouds broke. Germany invaded Poland ; and England and France, true to their pledge to support Poland against aggression, declared war on Germany. The first of September saw the world in the throes of a war. Its reaction on India was sudden and memorable. Her sympathy was with England and the allies ; and yet she found that she could not express this sympathy in any other form than in mere words. She asked herself, and England, what the aim of the war was, but could get no answer. Did the suppression of Nazism and

Hitlerism really mean that nations would be allowed to enjoy their peace and their freedom ? Did it mean that India would share in the evolution of a new world order, that she would regain her freedom as an independent nation ? Was Poland only an end in itself, or was it a symbol ? The Working Committee of the Indian National Congress met and deliberated long on the attitude which the country should adopt towards the allies, and ultimately passed a resolution asking the British Government to declare their war aims in general, and as they related to India. Mr. Bose who believes in striking hard while the iron is hot expressed disappointment at the resolution, while Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said that it represented the line of statesmanship, the way to victory. Non-Congressmen in general continued to pick holes as usual. They discovered in it the taint of bargaining, and were shocked at the utter lack of chivalry in the Congress make up.

In the meanwhile, the Defence of India Bill was passed by the Assembly, and ordinances, one by one made their appearance. His Excellency the Viceroy, while addressing the Joint Session of the Central Legislature referred to the suspension of federation. " These preparations (for federation) as you are aware, are well advanced, and

great labour has been lavished on them in the last three years. Federation remains, as before, the objective of His Majesty's Government ; but you will understand, without any elaborate exposition on my part, the compulsion of the present international situation and the fact that given the necessity for concentrating on the emergency that confronts us, we have no choice but to hold in suspense the work in connection with preparations for federation, while retaining federation as our objective". Thus the first tangible benefit which India derived from the war was the suspension, perhaps beyond every possibility of a revival, of the federal scheme. The assumption of extraordinary powers by the Governor-General, without even consulting the provincial ministries was yet another outcome of the international situation. The provincial governments, which were supposed to be democratic, were reduced to an unenviable plight of helplessness. While Indians in general were willing and eager to help Britain in her difficulties, they could not appreciate the manner in which the Government treated their views and sentiments. The opinion gathered strength that India should co-operate with England and the allies voluntarily, and not under compulsion, that she must have the freedom to determine the ex-

tent of the co-operation and the conditions governing it. If the object of the war was to ensure the freedom of nations, that object should be applied to India before she was asked to lend her sympathy and co-operation. In short, political India wanted the British government to declare whether freedom would be granted to India after the war or at any time.

After the Working Committee had passed its resolution, His Excellency the Viceroy invited the leaders of parties, as many as fifty-two in number, to ascertain their views on India's future constitutional progress. Having sounded the views of the so-called leaders, His Excellency issued his statement on future reforms—a document which somehow failed to catch the imagination of the Indian people. In the words of Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, "it is a very deeply disappointing statement. A great and unique occasion has been simply thrown away. Instead of a new courage and new imagination befitting the great crisis which Britain and the world are passing through—a courage and an imagination which would have found its shape in a bold step and a few simple words which would have gone straight to the heart of the Indian nation—we have flung at us a language and an attitude all too familiar and in this

crisis inappropriate and most unfortunate". Even Sir Muhammad Usman, sometime Governor of Madras, could not find his way to enthuse over the Viceregal announcement. "The statement of the Viceroy will be received in India with great disappointment. By not reconstructing the Central Government with the real leaders of public opinion, a great opportunity is being missed for a united Indian stand behind the British government during this world crisis".

His Excellency's statement deserves careful study. "I would only add that the Instrument of Instructions issued to me as Governor-General by His Majesty the King Emperor in May 1937, lays upon me as Governor-General a direction so to exercise the trust which His Majesty has reposed in me that the partnership between India and the United Kingdom within our Empire may be furthered to the end that India may attain its due place among our Dominions". After pointing out that the Act of 1935 was the result of the greatest common measure of agreement among the various parties and interests in India, the statement goes on to deal with the future reforms: "His Majesty's Government recognised that when the time comes to resume consideration of the plan for the future federal government of

India and of the plan destined to give effect to the assurances given by the late Secretary of State, it will be necessary to reconsider in the light of the then circumstances to what extent the details of the plan embodied in the Act of 1935 remain appropriate. And I am authorised now by His Majesty's Government to say that at the end of the war, they will be very willing to enter into consultation with representatives of the several communities, parties, and interests in India and with the Indian Princes, with a view to securing their aid and co-operation in the framing of such modifications as may seem desirable. . . . With the best will in the world, progress must be conditioned by practical considerations. I am convinced myself, if I may say so with the utmost emphasis, that having regard to the extent of agreement which in fact exists in the constitutional field, and in this most difficult and important question of the nature of the arrangements to be made for expediting and facilitating the attainment by India of her full status, there is nothing to be gained by phrases which widely and generally expressed contemplate a state of things which is unlikely to stand at the present point of political development the test of practical application, or to result in that united effort by all parties and by all commu-

nities in India on the basis of which alone India can hope to go forward as one and occupy the place to which her history and her destinies entitle her." After thus laying down the future of India and the conditions governing that future, His Excellency tackled the problem of unity at the present day. He suggested the "formation of a consultative Committee representative of all major political parties in British India, and of the Indian Princes over which the Governor-General would himself preside, which would be summoned at his invitation, and which would have as its object the association of public opinion in India with the conduct of the war and with questions relating to war activities."

The statement viewed dispassionately is extremely disappointing. "There is no mention in it of independence, freedom, democracy, or self-determination, no attempt even to justify the dragooning of India into war without reference to her people and her being forced to join an adventure for objectives which are not hers. The hand of friendship which the Congress had extended has been spurned by the government". The arguments advanced against a clear declaration of India's constitutional future do not convince. Instead of saying what India will be, the statement

suggested a vague ideal to be attained at a remote period. India would take her place among the great dominions of the Empire, not now, not even after the war, but at a time when His Majesty's government would be convinced of India's readiness and competence to register the requisite political advance. At present His Majesty's government could not do anything more than suggest the ultimate ideal, and advise the Indian people to settle their mutual differences. The Viceroy's statement was supplemented by those of Sir Samuel Hoare, and of the Secretary of State, but political India was not satisfied with them at all. While the Muslim League, in spite of its tall talk about independence, studiously avoided expressing any definite opinion on this most momentous question of the day, while other political parties were indulging in the safe but facile game of sitting on the fence, the Congress alone, true to its traditions and ideals, declared its inability to co-operate with the government, and directed its ministries in eight provinces to resign. In the first week of November eight out of the eleven provincial ministries in India resigned their office and the Governors took charge of the administration in all but one of them. Thus, the war, instead of bringing the greatest political party in

India and the government closer than before created an ever-widening chasm between them. The war which is being fought for safeguarding the integrity and independence of the nations of the world, which has for its ostensible aim the upholding of the principles of democracy had its reactions on Indian political aspirations in a manner which was detrimental to her national unity and solidarity. It is indeed sad to reflect that the war should deprive India of her popular governments which in the short period of two years had proved in a remarkable manner India's ability and readiness to shoulder the responsibility of shaping her own destinies.

The resignation of the Congress ministries was the signal for the Muslim League and the minorities to begin their agitation against the Congress demand. Mr. Jinnah celebrated the event by asking the League to observe a deliverance day, and by springing up a surprise on the people of this country by his demand for a Royal Commission to enquire into the atrocities committed by Congress ministries. The British government did not somehow fall in line with this demand. The Muslim League for a moment forgot its creed of independence, and began to oppose the Congress demand for a constitution framed by the

people of India. The very idea of a constituent assembly was an aversion to the Muslim League, for in a constituent assembly communalists have very little chance of forcing their way through. According to the Muslim League, and the vested interests in the country, a constitution framed by a constituent assembly would be a constitution acceptable only to the Congress. Mr. Jinnah and the minorities declare that the framing of a constitution for India should be preceded by the guarantee of their special rights and privileges. They have no faith in their own country men and want England to stand by them. How this attitude of theirs can be reconciled with their talk of independence, it is impossible to understand. The political advance of India is thus made dependent on the settlement of the communal question. England has not been slow to take advantage of this division in our ranks. British statesmen have been repeatedly telling us that the moment we evolve unity among ourselves, the constitutional problem would solve itself easily. The Congress, on the other hand, says that the communal question is a domestic affair, which can be settled by the parties concerned without extraneous help. A free India will evolve a constitution for herself which will have the support and sanc-

tion of all her people. Anyhow, the stalemate continues, and the political progress of India is held up by communal wrangling. The tyranny of the minority over the majority has nowhere been so strikingly exemplified as here in India.

While the minorities have every right to safeguard their interests, they cannot continue tyrannising over the majority. The Muslim League's grievances may be real or imaginary, but its claim to represent the whole Muslim community in India cannot stand scrutiny. The *London Times* wrote recently thus : " The League, although the number of its members is impressive, no more represents Muslim India than the Congress represents India as a whole. There are many Muslim bodies which do not follow Mr. Jinnah's lead and by no means are all League members content with his leadership. Secondly, some of his recent utterances have given the impression that the British policy of defending the lawful interests of the minorities has encouraged him to think that members of the Muslim League are entitled to veto any and every constitutional advance simply because they are the minority. Purely negative attitude of that kind is really just as great an obstacle to political progress as are the totalitarian claims of more advanced members of the Con-

gress.... It is true that Congress ministries in the provinces where the party was lately in power appear to have been well disposed to the Muslim minority."

While the minorities have taken up a negative attitude, the Congress has placed before the country a definite proposal. The constituent assembly idea has nothing objectionable in it. On the other hand, the principle behind it is most sound. If under existing conditions a full-pledged constituent assembly is not a workable proposition, it can be adapted to our conditions without losing sight of the principle behind it. If one is not mistaken in one's inference, the Congress only wants a constitution to be framed with the sanction of the people of India. It is the principle that matters ; not the details. Many leading Congressmen have made it clear that any modification of the form will be welcomed by the Congress, as long as the principle behind it is accepted. It is gratifying to find that the British government have begun to appreciate the attitude of the Congress. When the other day, in the course of his speech at the Orient Club in Bombay, His Excellency pointed out that Dominion Status of the Westminster type would be granted to India, he acknowledged India's right to freedom. That His

Excellency is anxious to end the present crisis is also evident from the repeated discussions he had with Mahatma Gandhi. The minorities seem to have played their game out. The British government cannot ignore the influence the Congress wields in the country. In this hour of crisis, when Britain needs the moral support of India, it will be unwise to ignore the Congress. The Congress has been following the policy of wise moderation till now. It has not precipitated an internal crisis, though there are members in its ranks anxious to declare war. The High Command under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi has shown itself willing to negotiate with the British government for an honourable understanding. England cannot belittle India's contribution to the war, and the greatest contribution India can make is her moral support. The cry of communalists has lost its novelty, and the British Government have begun to realise that if they give in too much to their demands, they will forfeit the sympathy of India. Under the circumstances, it is not too much to hope that the Congress and the government will come to an early understanding and that the present crisis will be resolved soon. It is futile to indulge in political prophecy, and yet one may hazard the guess that the present tangle will be

unravelling and that the Congress will resume its constructive work in the constitutional field with redoubled vigour. Mahatma Gandhi and the Viceroy can be depended upon to accomplish what apparently seems to be an impossible task. Congress is now at the cross-roads, but let us hope it will soon go back to its rightful place and continue its great work of building up the India of the future.

THE END

